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HAND UNDER HAND, BALD HEAD WENT DOWN THE SWAYING LARIAT.

Bald Head's Pard;

OR,

CREEPING CAT'S CUNNING.

A Romance of the Rio Llano.

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ROCKY'S 'BOYEES,'" ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

CROSSING THE RIO LLANO.

IN the year of grace 185-, there resided in the county of Bowie, Texas, on the bank of the Red River, two planters; the one, named Arthur Arundale, generally known as Captain Arundale, and the other Charles Courtney.

These two planters were familiar, indeed most intimate friends; both, perhaps being drawn more toward each other from the fact that they were widowers, their wives having died within a short time of each other.

Besides, they had each one child: Captain Arundale's daughter Alice having been quite small at the death of her mother, and Courtney's son Carlos some three years older. The families, thus reduced in numbers, were quite frequently together, although the mansions were situated about five miles from each other.

Carlos, having a saddle-pony, spent much of his time at the Arundales', he and Alice studying together, riding, boating, and wandering in the luxuriant bottom-timber of Red River.

And this intimacy which had existed from childhood, ripened into love as the youth and maiden reached the respective ages when such a sentiment is supposed to rule the human mind. The result was that Carlos was the accepted lover of Alice when he had barely reached his nineteenth year; the maiden being at that time sweet sixteen.

However, as is often the case, clouds were destined to darken their sky. Their bark was fated to encounter storms that would toss them about at the mercy of the angry waves on a sea of trouble.

This came from an entirely undreamed-of source.

Charles Courtney and Arthur Arundale became interested, as partners, in various speculative schemes, which were mostly superintended by the former, Arundale leaving the investment of large sums to the judgment of his friend.

For some time these speculations proved successful; but the time came when luck changed, and Courtney was forced to admit to Arundale that their all was lost, even to the growing crops on the plantations, they having been mortgaged.

Captain Arundale was furious. He lost sight of the fact that his friend was an equal loser with himself.

Bitter words passed between them, and they

parted in anger, Arundale forbidding Courtney to ever again cross his threshold; refusing to listen to any explanations or reasonings of his former friend, who still, regardless of the anger and insults of the captain, held him in the highest esteem.

Captain Arundale forbade his daughter not only from ever entertaining the idea of marriage with Carlos Courtney, but threatened her with his severest anger should she ever again meet the youth.

Courtney, too, impressed upon his son the fact that, should he attempt to visit Alice again, the captain would, without doubt, most grossly insult him, and advised him no longer to venture down the river in his rides. But Carlos Courtney was not the young man to be deprived of the society of one whom he prized above all others on earth, who had been his pet and playmate from childhood; and disregarding his father's counsels and the threats of Captain Arundale, he made frequent trips down the river amid the bottom-timber, where, secreted in a moss-draped tree, he watched and waited many a time for Alice to visit some of their former haunts.

After persevering efforts he succeeded in once more meeting the young girl; and then and there the two reasoned and conferred upon the subject of their undreamed-of trouble. Alice decided that her father was unjust in his anger against Mr. Courtney, and particularly so in condemning the son for the fancied wrongs done him by the father.

Having come to this decision, they fixed upon a more retired point at which they might meet occasionally, vowing again and again that they would remain true to each other, and hoping that in time the heart of Captain Arundale would soften.

Thus, frequently and unknown to their parents, the lovers met, but a change was destined to come over the spirit of their dreams as unexpected and grievous as had been the anger and enmity of Captain Arundale. This was neither more nor less than the announced departure of the latter for Western Texas, to engage in the business of cattle-raising, he informing his daughter that she must prepare for their departure, and that he would probably locate on the borders of civilization, where land was cheap.

Great was the anguish of the youthful pair, and they conferred together on the gloomy prospects ahead of them—prospects which had, at one time, been so bright and golden. These conferences always ended in an avowal by Carlos that he would equip himself and follow the wagon train, keeping informed of their every movement and near enough to lend a hand in protecting Alice from the dangers of the trail, which were laughed at and repudiated by the maiden's father whenever she referred to the subject.

The captain, notwithstanding that he had unjustly separated his daughter from the young man whom he knew she loved most truly and devotedly, was yet wrapped up in his only child.

He had formed the resolution to emigrate as much to remove Alice from the vicinity of the Courtneys as aught else, for his hatred toward his former friends seemed to increase instead of diminish as time passed.

Carlos informed his father as to his intentions in regard to following Alice, and revealed the fact that he and she had frequently met, and although Mr. Courtney did not favor the matter and reasoned for some time against such a wild whim, he finally consented and gave his son a good outfit, promising that if he succeeded in bringing Captain Arundale to a sense of his own injustice, he would himself dispose of his plantation and locate near his former friend. For Charles Courtney felt for the captain the same esteem and regard as of old, and would be happy to see Alice Arundale the wife of his son.

At the last meeting between Alice and Carlos, the latter agreed to travel without revealing himself, and thus being exposed to the anger of the captain; but he resolved to gain speech with his darling, should an opportunity offer for so doing.

Thus were matters arranged.

Arthur Arundale disposed of his plantation, and reserving but six wagons, the same number of slaves, and his more valued households—which last were placed in the "prairie schooners," a Dearborn being purchased for the sole use and benefit of Alice, and the captain mounted on a favorite horse—they started, on a bright and sunny morning, for their projected abode in the West. The eyes of the young girl filled with tears at leaving her childhood's home, but she was not a little cheered by the consciousness that Carlos would follow.

Bidding farewell to his fond father, the youth set out the next morning and followed the wagon-train and Dearborn day after day. He felt no anxiety for them or for himself, until, meeting a scout, known as Perlow Cabase, or Bald Head, as he had been dubbed, near the Rio Llano, from whom he not only got news of those whom he was following, but also that Captain Arundale had resolved to cross the river westward, where there were no settlers, and where it was reported that Indians were encamped.

Getting all the information from the scout that he could, Carlos encamped with the Texan one night, and, making him his confidant, resolved that he would cross the Llano himself, and ascertain if any Indians were dangerously near the stream.

Bidding the scout farewell, after engaging him to keep a watchful eye upon the Dearborn, and a lookout for danger generally, Carlos Courtney galloped toward the Rio Llano, Perlow Cabase promising that he would see him in a day or two.

CHAPTER II.

THE LONE RIDER.

OLD SOL has shot down his hot rays all the day with withering power, and is now slowly sinking toward the horizon line. Indeed, in an hour's time, he will have disappeared from view.

And those who have been forced to travel over the vast plains of Western Texas, beneath brazen sky, will not regret his departure.

However, the power of the sun has been diminished for some time, and as it reaches the point mentioned, it seems like a huge ball of crimson, upon which the human eye can gaze unflinchingly; occasioned by the atmosphere's being filled with a thick and quivering heat, refracted from the earth.

The sun lends to this haze its sanguine color, causing the air to appear filled with fine dust of a blood-red hue.

Although natural, the scene is most unnatural, from the fact that one very seldom sees nature as we have but faintly described it.

And this strange, grand, and beautiful scene claimed the attention of one, whom we propose to follow through deadly peril, torture and anguish, of which the day-god seems to warn him, by assuming the strange and gory hue, so striking and most impressive.

At the time mentioned, a horseman spurred his steed from the cool shades of the bottom-timber, which bordered a creek some twenty miles northerly from Fort Mason, and which was a tributary of the Rio Llano.

The horse of this lone rider was covered with sweat and flecks of foam, except its limbs, which were dripping with water, showing that he had but just forded the little stream in his rear.

The rider was not more than twenty years of age, but well-developed, with a splendid physique, and with a face that was fair to look upon—in fact, for a man, very winning.

Long, wavy, dark brown hair, hazel eyes, and Grecian nose, with but a slight mustache and imperial; chin and lips that indicated firmness, piercing eyes and a general bearing that denoted daring and bravery, approaching recklessness. These were the noticeable characteristics of him who urges his horse from the timber, jerking the animal to a halt.

Wonder and amazement are in his face, as he gazes afar to the distant horizon, over the level, unbroken, seemingly limitless plain.

This young man is evidently not a frontier wanderer, as his skin is not deeply tanned, and his clothing is as yet free from the wear and tear of travel, or stains of camp-life.

He wears buckskin breeches, however, that are fringed at the outer seams, and ornamented with buttons, thickly set, but the garments are nearly new. They are tucked into the legs of high-topped boots of fine workmanship, upon the heels of which are a pair of spurs. A blue woolen shirt, confined loosely at the neck by a black kerchief, and a sombrero, also black, made up his outfit, in the way of clothing.

A brace of Colt's six-chambered revolvers, and a bowie hung at an embossed belt at his waist, while a Colt's carbine, five-chambered and carrying conical ounce balls, was suspended to his saddle-horn. The usual blankets, canteen, and saddle-bags were secured behind the cantle of the saddle.

His horse is a superb animal, called in Texas a "buckskin;" the beast being cream color with black tail, mane, and muzzle, and showing points for speed and endurance—the latter quality having evidently been well tested during the day.

As has been mentioned, the horseman jerked his horse to a halt, immediately after clearing the timber, and getting a glimpse at the grand and beautiful scene, which has been barely alluded to.

The horse stretched its muzzle out straight, as well as its long neck, drawing the reins through its master's hand to such an extent as to allow it to tear the grass from the sod; one quick glance westward having satisfied the momentary wonder of the hungry animal.

For some moments the lone rider sat his steed, silent and motionless; his astonished, appreciative gaze fastened upon the brilliant vista in front of him, and appearing utterly unconscious of his other surroundings.

From his position, westward, northwestward, and southward, the vast plain stretching to the horizon-line is as level as a floor. It is also covered with grass, which, except close to the earth, is withered and dead—dry as tinder.

Not a tree, bush or stone—not even the slightest elevation or swell is there, in the broad expanse.

The faintest zephyr of a breeze from the eastward stirs the feathery grass-tops; but it is as hot as the breath of a furnace, and the whole visible world seems to be scorched and seared by the merciless sun, the face of which appears bloated, inflamed with murderous wrath, at having its power curtailed by the hazy atmosphere.

The hot grasses are as devoid of moisture as ashes that covers smoldering coals of fire; and all the broad view is painfully suggestive of burning thirst and fiery torture, of destruction and desolation.

With a heavy, long-drawn sigh, the young man turns half about in his saddle, and gazes at the serpentine ribbon of verdure behind him, which is most relieving to the eye. Indeed, strong relief is imprinted upon his handsome face, as if the view in his front had been so impressive as for the moment, to banish the possibility of green shades, or aught of life—as if he had suddenly been transported to another world, a bare, withered, unbroken surface, ruled by a sphere of fire, himself and his horse being the only animate object upon it.

But, had he been gifted with the power of foreseeing the events, of witnessing the scenes which were fated to transpire on that far-stretching, withered plain, before the blood-red sun relieved the earth from its torturing heat and fiery face, he would have been forced to admit that the present view was paradise in comparison; that, as suggestive of Hades as it now was, it would be, as he was doomed soon to see it, a very hell, more appalling, more horrible than could be conceived of by the wildest imaginings.

But he dreamed not of the awful events, which were so soon to occur—dreamed not of the hellish sights and sounds that were, ere long, to torture eye and ear; and he urged his horse along the edge of the timber, northerly, gazing into the dark shades, as if searching for a favorable place to encamp, but at times casting sweeping glances from north to south upon the strange and unearthly view.

CHAPTER III.

PAINT-DAUBED FIENDS.

"THE old scout was right," he soliloquized. "I ought to have taken his advice, and not crossed the Rio Llano. The prospect toward the west is far from promising; in fact the plain seems limitless, and, from the long drought, little better than a desert waste.

"It has been a terrible day for my good horse, as well as for myself; and I am now positive that I have been traveling in a course nearly parallel with the Llano, which I might just as well have kept near as not. But I really thought that I should discover the Dearborn wagon on the plain.

"Good heavens! If I should fail to trace the outfit, I believe I would go mad. Can it be that Captain Arundale has changed his course—has thought better of the advice of that old scout, and turned toward the south, leaving Fort Mason to the west? I should rejoice if such was the fact; for he is insane to think of settling west of the fort. It was only last season that the Comanches massacred the rancheros and their families, within pistol-shot of the station.

"But, he is too headstrong to listen to the advice of any one; even when he knows that the old scout is one of the best informed men on this border. And Allie, dear girl, is she so confident that I will follow them, and break down the barrier between her father and myself that she is happy at the change—rejoiced to leave behind her those who were so free to gossip in regard to her love for me, and the dislike, or rather hatred, of her father for me?

"And I will break down the barrier! His prejudice shall vanish. I shall win Allie as my wife. I have sworn it, and I'll keep my oath.

"I will encamp here to-night, inspect the north and south plains in the morning, and, if the wagons are not in view, I will return to the Rio Llano. Captain Arundale must not see me, but I shall endeavor to communicate with Alice, and assure her of my watchfulness. I must keep the outfit in view or hover near them, ready to defend them, if they should be in danger.

"It is very strange that one can pass, in a day's ride, from verdant prairies, with here and there an oak motte and water-hole, where there is an abundance of game, to a location so barren, and devoid of all signs of animal life. Captain Arundale may regret, when too late, that he refused the proffered services of the old guide, scout, and ranger, Bald Head, as he calls himself. He is, indeed, a most singular and comical specimen of humanity; but, without doubt, a terror to the Indians and Greasers.

"Captain Arundale pretends to know the country, and scoffed at the stories of the old scout, as Perlow informed me, in regard to the danger from the red-men; asserting that the tales of blood and rapine are invented by the ranche os about Fort Mason, to frighten settlers from coming to locate lands, thus crowding the ranges with cattle.

"The old scout, however, is truth and honesty itself, and I believe his every word. I am convinced that he will not lose sight of the wagons, long at a time, for he confessed to me

that Alice's beauty and grace had taken him by storm. And it is no wonder. She is an angel, and if harm comes to her, woe be to those who are the authors of it!

"I dare say the scout will decide that I have made a fool of myself by striking so far west, and thus missing the captain's trail. However, I'll remedy the matter to-morrow. Rover, old boy," patting the neck of his horse, "you have had a hard day's travel, and need good grass; which you shall have, for all is fresh and green near the creek."

While thus communing with himself the lone rider had reached a point fully a mile from that at which he had first emerged from the bottom timber; and he turned his animal into the shades, to inspect the same, and ascertain if there was sufficient ground to graze the horse.

But he had not penetrated the undergrowth more than twenty paces when he halted suddenly, sprung to the earth, and secured the beast to a sapling. He then grasped the rifle from his saddle-horn, and stood silent and motionless as a statue, his form bent forward, and his eyes sweeping the bottom far up the creek; his senses and muscles strained for immediate action.

The horse also, although nearly famished, tossed its head around and gazed in the same direction; its nostrils quivering and pointed to catch the scent of that which had alarmed its master. The affrighted, nervous action of the animal was noticed by the young man, who quickly bound a kerchief about the animal's muzzle above the nostrils, thinking thus to prevent any snorting or neighing.

Again the young man listened, and his features became filled with apprehension as he stole stealthily through the undergrowth and up the creek; for, through the bottom, up-stream, sounded the crashing of branch and bush, and the struggling of a large number of animals from the north to the south plain.

That these animals were horses the listener had decided in a moment; but he was not sufficiently versed in frontier life to decide whether they were wild mustangs or beasts ridden and controlled by man.

But a moment or two of cautious crawling and the traveler reached the edge of the timber, and there crouched, secure from view; gazing out and up-stream toward the point of alarm, where, the indications were, would be the exit of the animals which had attracted his attention and no slight apprehension.

Not long had he to wait, for suddenly a sight broke upon his appalled senses which caused his eyes to bulge in horror and his face to become ghastly. And little wonder; for, shooting around the bend of timber, dashed full threescore of Comanche braves in all their horrid paraphernalia of war—their hideous faces made more so by lines and bars and daubs of yellow and black pigment, white gypsum and vermilion. This was likewise smeared upon their naked arms and bodies, and even upon the wild-eyed and snorting mustangs that they rode.

Feathers and scalps flaunting from leggings and lances, the latter projecting afar over their feather-bedizened heads and held by a strap at the rear of their arms, while the heel was stuck into a skin socket at their stirrups. The steel

points of these long lances glittered and flashed in the blood-red rays of the sun, which illuminated the hellish faces and forms of the Comanche warriors, increasing their horrible appearance.

On the paint-daubed devils dashed, their quirts cutting air and hissing like snakes as they lashed their foam-flecked steeds; the forms of the braves bent forward, their black and glittering eyes fixed and glaring exultingly from out the framework of paint bars; down the creek they sped, parallel with the timber.

On, with the swish and rush of a "norther," the dry grass cracking amid the fast-flying hoofs, as if the stalks were suddenly lapped by seething flames.

Thus on, past the thicket within which crouched the young traveler of the wilds, who clutched his rifle in a vise-like grip, his teeth clinched, his handsome face contorted with dread, his features pallid as death; for he pictured his darling in the power of the fiendish horde before him.

Still, as if transformed into stone, as if suddenly deprived of all power to move, rigid, and with his eyes fixed and staring—thus, for a moment or two, he sat. Then he sprung erect, and gazed down-stream, after the fast-galloping horde; who, eager for scalps, blood and revenge, flew toward the very point at which he had so recently emerged from the timber, and looked upon the strange sunset.

As he thus gazed, his heart overflowing with thanks, as he thought that those for whom he was in search were not in the vicinity to fall victims to the merciless Indians—as he gazed thus, two pairs of mules dashed from the line of timber between himself and the Comanches, followed by a Dearborn, on the front seat of which sat a beautiful maiden, holding the reins.

This sight the agonized watcher saw, with the utmost dumfounded amazement and agonized concern.

He realized that his friends must have followed the creek, from the Rio Llano, on the north side of the timber; and, from the fact of a northerly sweeping bend, had been hidden from his view.

Clutching at a sapling for support, trembling with the sudden, unexpected, and terrible sight, that racked his brain, and paralyzed him for the moment, he strove with all his power of will to recover himself, and act; but at that very instant a terrified shriek of horror shot from the lips of the maiden in the Dearborn, as she perceived the hellish horde, although the savages were galloping away from her.

No sooner, however, did this cry cut the air, than the paint-daubed fiends turned quickly in their saddles, whirling their steeds, and dashing madly toward the Dearborn; filling the air at the same time with war-whoops, and the most fiendish yells of exultation.

The agonized young man tore through the undergrowth toward his horse, crying out in a voice of the strangest intonation:

"Oh, God! My Alice, my Alice is doomed! Oh, for the strength of a Samson! She shall be saved, or the knives of the red-men shall let out my life-blood. I swear it, by my hopes of Heaven—I, Carlos Courtney!"

CHAPTER IV.

CREEPING CAT.

THAT broad, seemingly limitless plain was destined to be the stage upon which a most startling drama was to be enacted; the bottom-timber of the creek serving in place of "flies," whence the actors appeared, brought to that isolated place on the far frontier in a strange and mysterious manner, and guided by a relentless and merciless fate.

The young man, Carlos Courtney, had been the first actor to appear; and he supposed, indeed he felt positive, that he was the only human being in the vicinity, no man or brute being within view, either on the north plain as he approached the creek, or the south and west after he had crossed it.

However, notwithstanding the fact that Carlos had not seen a human or a brute, there were many of both within the shades, and watching his approach. There was one who would have given much to have attracted his attention, and who loved him as fondly and truly as ever maiden loved her hero, by whom he had been observed.

This was none other than Alice Arundale, who, being ahead of her father and the wagons, had discovered Carlos as she turned her mules around a bend in the creek, and just as her lover dashed into the timber. And it was with the hope of getting speech with him that caused her to whip up her mules, and, dashing ahead, ford the stream at the very point where she had seen Carlos disappear—there to be stricken with terror at the sight of the fiendish horde of savages instead of the pride of her heart, Carlos Courtney.

Two more there were, up the creek, who were filled with great concern when they saw Carlos galloping over the north plain; for they knew of the lurking Indians, and they feared that the young man would ride directly into the midst of them. Yet they were powerless to aid or to warn him, as the red demons were congregated between them and that portion of the timber for which Carlos was heading.

They were much relieved when they saw him turn more easterly, and enter the bottom at some distance from the Indians; but they had little hope that he would escape, as the Comanches started down stream shortly after.

Not only did these two discover Carlos at the very time that they were themselves watching the Indians, but they also saw, some miles toward the Llano River, smoke signals, made by Indians, thus telegraphing to the war-party. And one of the two was filled with intense apprehension.

This was none other than Perlow Cabase or Bald Head, the scout spoken of by Carlos during the soliloquy of the latter, and who feared that these signals were made by Indian spies, who had discovered the wagons of Captain Arundale whom he had warned against venturing west of the Rio Llano.

The companion of Bald Head was a friendly Indian—a Caddo, known as Creeping Cat, from his success among his people as a spy.

This Indian had never met Carlos Courtney or the Arundales, but it was sufficient for him

to know that his white pard was a friend to these parties, to insure his services in their defense against any danger. For the friends of one were the friends of the other. This was a compact long formed, when the Caddo had been saved by Bald Head from the torture-stake, at the very moment when the Comanche braves who had captured him were dancing around him.

Bald Head—a very appropriate cognomen, as his head was as smooth as a billiard-ball, with the exception of a grayish fringe that extended from the back of one ear to that of the other—was habited in a blue woolen shirt, buckskin breeches and heavy boots, on the heels of which were buckled a pair of long-roweled Mexican spurs. He was armed with a brace of Colt's army revolvers, a five-chambered carbine of the same make, and a huge bowie-knife.

The face of the old scout was thin, wrinkled, and of smoky hue, his eyes gray and piercing, his nose long, and a full beard covered his lips.

Take him altogether, Perlow Cabase was a decidedly comical-looking personage.

Creeping Cat, however, was just the opposite, for he was of fine form, straight as a forest pine, and noble in appearance. He was naked from the waist up, wearing only leggings, breechcloth, and moccasins, while a beaded fillet of feathers kept his long hair partly confined.

Bow and quiver were at his back, and a revolver and a long scalping-knife at his belt, while a carbine like Perlow's was held in his hand.

Creeping Cat was in the war-paint of his tribe, and his black piercing eyes, his agile movements and sinewy form spoke of daring deeds and undaunted bravery—to say nothing of the scalps that fringed his leggings and quiver.

The Comanches, who had ridden down the south side of the creek, and entered the timber, had discovered Carlos on the north plain, and awaited within the shades to capture him, Perlow and Creeping Cat having been within the timber, following the Indians to ascertain in what direction the war-party were intending to raid, in order that they might warn the rancheros down-country.

When Alice Arundale whipped up her mules, and dashed from view around the bend, her father, who was with the wagons, five in number—these being in the care of negro teamsters—was something like a quarter of a mile behind, he riding a fine horse.

Feeling much concern at his daughter's disappearance around the bend, Captain Arundale drove spurs, and was soon at the spot where Alice and the Dearborn had disappeared, and which commanded a view of the line of timber for a long distance to the northwest. To the captain's great surprise, the Dearborn was nowhere in sight. He knew, however, as a matter of course, that his daughter had driven into the timber.

Turning in his saddle, Captain Arundale by gestures, ordered the negroes to turn the mules into the bottom, and ford the stream; he, at the same time forcing his horse directly through the undergrowth and stream. Just as the steed, rendered frantic by the cruel spurs, was on the very verge of the wood that bordered

the south plain, the shriek of Alice struck her father's ears, and he dashed madly forward. At that moment the war-whoop of the savages rung out, and the horse of the now anguished father bounded out from the timber, upon the open plain.

It was then that the Indians, who had whirled their animals, were dashing on the back trail, the captain being between the Comanches and the fair girl, who, pale as a corpse, clutched the reins in one hand and the side-bar of the vehicle with the other, so dazed with fright that she knew not what to do.

But the mules, terrified by the whoops of the Comanches, sprung in a mad gallop over the plain, and, at that very moment, Alice saw her father speed from the timber and dash toward her, the war-painted horde within arrow-shot of him. At this stage of the most startling and unexpected surprises on all sides, a brave, in the rear of the war-party, gave a sounding signal yell, and a dozen of the rear warriors, at a gesture from their chief, turned their horses about again and lashed the animals down-stream, for the lead wagon was just clearing the timber, and the negro teamster was so terrified at the fearful sight that met his view, that he sat his wheeler as if paralyzed. But the mules proceeded along, and the next wagon followed.

The yelling Indians, who dashed toward the wagons, drove the mules to frenzy, and away they went at a mad gallop over the plain, in a course parallel with the Dearborn.

Then a solitary Indian sped from the creek bottom some distance northwest of the scene of dire confusion, and sprung from his horse, after gaining for some length on the open plain. He then set fire to the tall, dry grass, which sprung into a blaze and spread in the twinkling of an eye, soon gathering force, and rushing, a wall of crackling, roaring flames, southward, threatening to destroy every living thing in its way unless they all turned eastward.

The air was filled with whoops and yells, the lash of quirts, and the rushing of hundreds of hoofs through the dry grass, mingled with which was the rattle of wagons as the mules dashed over the plain in a wild stampede.

Never was there a more sudden and appalling transformation from the deathlike stillness that ruled when Carlos Courtney rode out from the timber, to a vocal pandemonium; from a level plain upon which was no moving object, to a most horrible race of demons after a terror-stricken maiden, an anguished father, and a half-dozen slaves, whose faces were now of ashen hue. Every form, too, was rendered unearthly by the glare of the flames to the west, and the blood-red sun, just above the horizon.

It was, indeed, an awful sight!

A sight that would appall the stoutest heart.

And all this Carlos Courtney saw as he sprung upon his horse and madly spurred to the edge of the timber. At the moment that he comprehended it all, and, with clinched teeth was about to dart madly forward, he was clutched tightly by the arms, jerked from his saddle, and forced to the earth, being held there securely and helpless as an infant by Bald Head and Creeping Cat, the Caddo.

Carlos caught a glimpse of but one of his captors, this being the Caddo, and believing that he was in the power of the Comanches, gave a groan of mortal anguish, and then strove, with herculean efforts, to struggle free.

"Easy, Pard Carlos! Easy," reasoned the old scout who held him. "We-uns ain't agoin' ter 'low yer ter throw yerself erway. Thar's no show ter git ther cap'n nor Miss Allie outen this hyer scrape, without doin' hit on ther sly. Keep cool, fer yer hes gut ter go or-mighty slow an' snaky in ther game, er lose ha'r."

"Hit war only by Proverdenche favorin' yer thet yer warn't scooped in by ther red heathen yerself. What we-uns hes gut ter do, air ter keep our peepers open, an' watch fer chances. Creepin' Cat, my red pard hyer, air with us, an' he's wo'th a rigiment when hit comes ter sarcumventin' Curmanch' bucks!"

Bald Head rattled off these words in a hasty, pleading manner; Carlos struggling all the time like a madman to free himself. But he found, strong as he was, that he could not shake off the grip of those whom he now knew to be his friends, and friends to the death at that.

"For the love of Heaven!" he cried out, panting and gasping for breath, "let me loose! Are you mad, that you would prevent me from saving my Allie from those painted demons? In mercy, let me go. I'll save her, or die in the attempt!"

"Ya-as," returned Bald Head, "I undercomstan's all thet. But, Carlos, hit hain't ter be did jest now. Doesn't yer see thet ef yer showed yer purty pictur' outside ther bush, thet yer'd be gobbled 'long o' ther cap'n an' ther leetle gal; an' then yer c'u'dn't do ther leastest thing toward reskyin' her, fer yer'd be tortur'd yerself."

"Now, ef yer'll lay low with we-uns, I'll make a afferdavy we gits Allie erway from ther hellyuns; though hit may take a heap o' time on a long trail, an' fine scoutin'. Ef yer doesn't 'gree ter leave these things ter work es I edvises, then ther gal, ther cap'n and yerself air all goners!"

"Thet's ther plain, solid, solemn, slam-up fac's o' ther case; an' yer can't git 'round 'em, 'ceptin' es I ses. Ain't thet squar', Caddo?"

"Bald Head talk heap good," agreed Creeping Cat. "Comanche braves thick as leaves on trees. Take scalp of Carlos, tie to torture-stake; then no help get white squaw. Hide in bush, follow trail, then creep in Comanche camp. Steal captives, take scalps, sound war-cry in light. Then ride fast. It is good. Heap bad now. Wait."

Carlos groaned, as he replied:

"This is worse than the most prolonged tortures the fiends could inflict—this inactivity! My friends, I have heard all that you have said, and I perceive that I was mad to think of charging alone among the whooping Comanches."

"It is foolish to attempt a rescue now, and so I yield to you. I will listen, and will abide by your coansels, for I know that you both are well versed in the manners and customs of these inhuman devils yonder, and can aid me in rescuing Alice—for rescued she must and shall be, or

my bones shall be gnawed by the wolves of the trail!"

"Thet's talkin' solid, an' hit's talk enough," was the reply of the scout. "Now, come on! Lead on yer critters up crick speedy, for hit's dangerous hyeraways. We-uns hes gut ter take keer o' ourselves, or ther cap'n an his'n 'll not hev a show ter crawl outen ther tight box what they're in 'bout now."

"Thar may be a call for we-uns ter chip in any minut', fer I doesn't 'low ter squat low, an' gaze et any hellishness. Ef ther cap'n an' ther leetle gal 'pears ter be in a fix ter be jarked from ther red hellyuns, why, jark's the word wi' Bald Head—yer kin jist gamble on thet!"

The Caddo stalked up the stream, followed by the old scout, Carlos bringing up the rear, and leading his horse, all walking as fast as the nature of the ground would admit, for about a rifle-shot of the distance. Then they advanced at a run, to the margin of the timber, having just caught sight of the blazing prairie.

CHAPTER V.

BETWEEN TWO FIRES.

WELL might Carlos Courtney dash frantically through the dense undergrowth at the fearful sight that now presented itself. On every side, except toward the east, where lay the creek bottom, all escape seemed cut off. A terrible dilemma presented itself.

If the hapless girl escaped the savage foe now bearing down exultantly upon them, it would be only to meet a no less certain, if possibly less fearful fate.

Around the seemingly doomed Alice a wide semi-circular sweep of flame stretched in weird magnificence, a wall of dense smoke towering above it, while within, between her and it, rode the maddened horde of Comanches, lashing their wild steeds onward, and yelling like enraged demons. Many a man, inured to every horror incident to border life, and brave even to desperation, would have given way at the first realization of such accumulated peril. But Alice Arundale had the blood of heroines in her veins, and where woman is brave—and what true woman is ever otherwise in the hour of danger—she surpasses in strength of will and presence of mind her ruder and stronger brothers.

True it was that the maiden did not, as yet, realize to the full the awful peril of her condition, but enough burst upon her gaze, at the first glance, to show that the possibilities of escape were but the veriest ghost of a forlorn hope.

Meantime the awful flames spread rapidly. The dense smoke grew thicker. The air was hot and suffocating. Around her, on three sides, and momentarily drawing nearer, was the ridge of flame. The little section of a circle, in which the Dearborn now halted was gradually growing smaller and fearfully less. Closer and closer drew the devouring element, leaving the rapidly lessening Zoar of refuge closing in a manner that was most horribly fan-like, east and west. The only point of safety from the devouring flames was for the pursued and their savage pursuers to turn easterly and strike the

creek bottom before reaching the abrupt turn of the same to the east.

Beyond that bend, two miles from the start of the terrible race from red fire and red foe, there was no hope. A terrible death in the seething, roaring flames was inevitable.

To make an abrupt turn toward the eastern line of timber was giving the Indians the advantage, and quite half a mile had the mules dashed from the place at which they had taken fright before Alice Arundale realized the situation—realized that if the galloping animals passed further south than the bend of the creek she would be doomed; doomed to be devoured by the raging flames of the prairie fire.

Not one female among a hundred, especially of the age of this true heroine, would have retained any judgment, or even sense, under these most awful circumstances and amid such terrible surroundings; but Alice, after her first moments of dazed horror had passed, and she saw her father spurring madly toward her, perceived that he was gaining on the Indians.

A second glance, at the negroes with the wagons, who were lashing their animals at terrific speed, much nearer the timber than she then was, decided the young girl that all depended upon her being able to turn her mules from south to east. She, therefore, summoned all her will power to overcome her fear and horror.

The fearful sight behind her, and to her right, and the awful doom that so surely threatened soon to overtake herself, her father, and the slaves, even did they escape the flames, was sufficient to plunge her into hopeless despair; but the brave girl, though with but slight grounds, reasoned that once in the timber they could defend themselves for a time, perhaps by mounting the fresh horses that were secured at the rear of the wagons, and all escape toward the Llano.

With this very faint and unreasonable hope, nerving her, Alice Arundale clutched the reins, braced her feet against the fore-board and pulled with all her strength, to turn the mules toward the east. And success crowned her efforts. The sight of the flames at the west had quite as much, if not more, influence in turning the animals, as had the fair maiden's strength at the reins.

No sooner had Alice accomplished this movement, than her father gave a cry of encouragement, and also turned his horse, at the same time gesticulating at his slaves, who, although frightened nearly out of their wits, jerked their mules toward the timber.

The negroes did not understand their master, but they took in the situation from the course of the fire, as well as from the fact that both he and their young mistress had turned toward the stream.

That the mustangs of the Comanches were fagged was evident, or the Indians would have held their own, and most certainly would have gained, after the pursued had changed their course, thus giving the savages the advantage of ground, for they would now be enabled to quarter upon their expected captives.

The negroes, with the wagons, were in the most critical condition in one respect, while in another they were favored.

First, the wagons were laden; but it was remarkable with what speed the terrified animals galloped with their heavy loads.

Secondly, they were fortunate in being much nearer the timber than any of the others; and also, in that they had been a longer distance from the foe at the start.

Every one of the black teamsters was most horrified; but the jeopardy of their master and mistress most affected them, for they knew that they were doomed if they were left to themselves.

They were, however, much encouraged at the gestures of Captain Arundale; for they believed that he must have hope of evading the enemy, by thus dashing into the timber. Well-trained and intelligent slaves they were, as their acts and proceedings proved.

Upon the turn being made, every wagon was forced to follow its own course, and each to enter the timber at different points. This movement they accomplished, just as the Comanches, with terrible blood-curdling yells, were within a pistol-shot of them.

Only the mules penetrated the timber, however, for the wagons stuck, and became fast against and between trees; but each negro sprung from his saddle on the wheeler, secured his rifle from the wagon-box, and fired quickly upon the approaching red-men. Then they rushed down the stream, loading as they ran, to do all in their power toward preventing their young mistress and master from being killed or captured.

Each knowing the location of the most southern wagon in the line, rushed to join the teamster of the same, who there awaited his fellow-slaves, giving out yells to guide them to him. Then the half-dozen blacks, armed with rifles and revolvers, sprung in a line through the timber, and soon reached a point opposite the position of the captain and Alice.

The latter had succeeded in getting the mules more under control; and, being but a short distance from the timber, while Captain Arundale was close behind, and shouting frantically, but unintelligibly, all the time—the exultant yells of the Indians drowning all other sounds.

Those of the Comanches who had been in chase of the wagons, were now at the same, and their long-drawn howls proclaimed that death had fallen upon some of their number—that the volley fired by the negroes had not been thrown away.

On flew the Dearborn, the poor girl now, as she neared the timber, realizing that a new danger threatened her; that the mules would dash the vehicle against the tree-trunks, and shatter it, perhaps kill, or maim herself.

However, there was no way to evade such an accident; and, with pallid face, the brave girl pulled steadily upon the reins, striving to lessen the speed of the animals as much as was possible.

And on clattered Captain Arundale, until within ten feet of the rear of the Dearborn, when he turned his steed to gain the side of the vehicle, yelling at the same time to his daughter:

"Jump, Allie! Jump as soon as you reach the timber, and run through the creek! I'll join

you, Heaven helping me. God guard you, my darling, if I fall!"

The maiden turned her face, tears streaming down her cheeks, and a loving look struggling through the dread horror that was occasioned by the sight that now caught her view in the rear of her father.

A long wall of flashing, roaring flame, with black smoke towering above it; and, between herself and it, the blood-eager Comanches, their long hair flying, and their bronzed arms circling in the air, as they lashed their frenzied mustangs onward.

In the infernal regions there could not have been presented a more terrible and awful sight; and no wonder was it that Alice Arundale shrieked, and sprung upright, to make a dash for more than life. As she neared the timber, at terrific speed, her father came alongside, and the hearts of both were now relieved and filled with hope, by a most welcome but unexpected sight. This was the six blacks, who sprung from the undergrowth in a line, but a little distance north from their master and mistress, and with their rifles in their hands.

Without an instant's delay, every rifle belched fire, and the leaden messengers of death hurtled through the foremost of the Comanches, causing death-howls and yells of agony, followed by whoops of frenzied fury and rallying-cries, as the survivors dashed onward.

But that momentary confusion had caused a change to take place, which the red-men had not observed; and when their attention was next drawn to the pursuit, there was nothing to pursue. The whites, the blacks, and the Dearborn—all had disappeared within the dark shades!

The next moment, with far-ringing war-cries, the Comanche hordelashed their mustangs, crashing through the undergrowth; a cloud of arrows preceding them. For a time there was a perfect bedlam, a most horrible din; through which cut the yells of agony and terror, as the poor negroes were either shot, trampled upon, or captured.

The captain and his daughter had, thus far, escaped; but the Comanches were seeking closely for any "sign" on the opposite side of the creek, that would reveal the trail of the missing ones.

A dozen braves lashed their horses directly into the stream, in a straight line from the Dearborn, which was now caught between two trees, the mules having stamped in harness, having broken the pole short off.

Into the middle of the creek these warriors urged their animals, their bows in hand and arrows fitted to string; then, from the undergrowth in their front, on the opposite side of the stream, shot a spurt of fire, followed by a sharp, far-sounding report. The leading brave threw up his arms, and with a horrible death-howl, sunk over the hams of his rearing, snorting mustang, into the water; his eyes filmed with death, his hideous face contorted with agony.

A yell of fury sprung from every throat, as the savages lashed their animals on through the stream—they knowing full well that their intended victims were now within their power, and close at hand.

But not two bounds had the mustangs made toward the opposite bank, amid the splashing

waters, when a fusilade of revolver-shots greeted them; and they saw on the bank, above the tops of the undergrowth, Captain Arundale with his pistols in hand, the weapons vomiting fire and lead. And, close behind him, her face ghastly in her terror, stood the trembling Alice, striving to drag her father away from the bank.

This was the last sight on earth to many of them, for Captain Arundale, realizing the great peril of himself and his child, threw no lead away, but with undaunted mien, stood bravely, firing rapidly at the red foe.

Half of the dozen braves floated down the waters, dead; most of the others being wounded. But, at the same instant that the captain fired his last shot, a score of painted demons, drawn by the sounds of rifle and revolver, came plunging through the undergrowth into the creek; there to behold their dead and wounded comrades.

Then shot out a simultaneous whoop of war, with cries of merciless fury and thirst for revenge; and, at the same moment, Captain Arundale clasped the trembling, horrified Alice in his arms, and darted into the thickets, the mad horde in swift pursuit!

CHAPTER VI.

VIEWING THE SCENE.

THE awful and most harrowing scene that was presented to the view of Carlos Courtney and his two friends, rendered the former speechless. Even the scout was completely dazed, and the Caddo clutched the handle of his knife, while his face was drawn with intense hatred, as he gazed on the Comanche horde; and the war-whoop of his tribe seemed about to burst from his lips.

Carlos grasped a sapling for support, his whole form trembling with anguish and horror, as he discovered the position of his darling, at the mercy of the runaway mules, the fire, and the savage fiends, who pursued her with their frightful yells.

The Comanches seemed much nearer to the captain and his daughter than they really were, from the fact that the Indians were between the observers and their intended victims.

For a moment the trio gazed, appalled and utterly hopeless of being of any assistance to either the whites or the blacks; indeed, it would have been madness, sheer suicide, to gallop to their aid. But no sooner did Alice turn her mules toward the creek-bottom, showing that, notwithstanding her dread position, she still retained judgment, and understood the peril she was in—no sooner did Bald Head see this, and the wild gestures of Captain Arundale to his slaves, than the old scout yelled:

"Mount, pards! Mount, es quick es ther Lord'll 'low yer, an' follow ther ole man! Miss Allie hev got more sense nor half the men-folkses. Jump, critters, fer thar'll be a show down crick ter gather a crap o' ha'r, an' mebbe so save ther cap'n an' ther leetle gal. Whoop-er-ee lively, an' git ready ter pick et triggers!"

By the time the old scout had shot out these words, he was in his saddle, as also were Carlos and Creeping Cat; and all, without a word, caused their animals to crash on through the

undergrowth to the creek. Through this they dashed, and thence through the ribbon of timber to the north plain; Bald Head in the lead, driving spurs at every jump of his horse.

Once clear of the trees and bushes, they all, at a mad gallop, dashed down the stream and along the border of the timber, sparing not their horses in the race upon which they all felt sure depended the lives of themselves, and those in such deadly danger.

And as they turned the bend from which point Alice Arundale had discovered Carlos and striven to attract his attention, the report of the rifles of the negroes burst upon their ears and soon after that of a second volley. Then they gained hope from the sounds of battle, especially as the death-howls of the savages reached their ears.

On they dashed, down the east side of the timber; on, until the rifle-shot and revolver-fusilade of the captain, as he fired into the Indians when the latter entered the creek, sounded in their front. But, although it was a thousand yards away, the reports came mingled with yells of fury and agony, and the piercing shrieks of the blacks.

Only a short distance did the trio gallop after these sounds when the crashing of bushes in the timber ahead of them, and the whoops of and pursuit and vengeful outcries warned Bald Head and the Caddo that they were too late to be of any assistance; that, should they proceed further thus exposed, they would themselves be killed or captured, for the bottom in front of them swarmed with Indians.

"Foller me, Pard Carlos, er ther condemned torterers'll skupe yer in ouden ther wet. They've kerral'd ther niggers what ain't laid out cold, an' we-'uns must watch fer chances ter help Allie an' ther cap'n. Skute inter ther bush er we're goners!"

During this mad gallop Carlos Courtney had reasoned much on the state of affairs, having recovered somewhat from the dazed condition of mind caused by the horrid and undreamed-of occurrences, and he began to realize that the only hope of being of any assistance to the captain and his daughter was by trusting entirely to Bald Head. The young man felt confident that if there was a possibility of saving them from being captured, or of rescuing them if captured, the scout and the Caddo would bend their energies to accomplish it, and with every chance of success that border-fighters could take advantage of.

Consequently Carlos immediately dashed into the timber, as Bald Head advised, and the three, secure from observation, awaited developments. The crashing through the bushes in all directions proved to the scout and Creeping Cat that the Comanches were searching for the white man and maiden, and that thus far they had avoided capture.

"Pards," said Bald Head, in a hoarse whisper, "ef ther painted kiotes gits a peep et we-'uns, then ther chances 'll be purty slim ahead fer biz. Ef we-'uns keeps ouden sight thar'll be a show ter play roots on ther or'nary torterers an' yank ther cap'n an' ther leetle gal ouden tha'r clutches.

"They'll kinder poke an' smell 'roun' arter

yer trail, Carlos, fer they war layin' fer yer when yer com'd 'cross ther no'th plain; but thar's bin sich a hefty 'mount o' lungin' 'roun' an' stompedin' critters thet hit'll be a long an' hard job ter pick up yer 'sign.' But, hush! Hyer comes some on 'em. Don't breathe hard, er our bacon's sp'iled, sure pop!

"Watch me, an' ef it's shoot an' cut, I'll gi'n ther word; shoutin' hit purty loud, yer kin gamble."

And it really did seem that the trio were fated to be discovered, for several Comanches lashed their mustangs directly toward the thicket in which they were concealed. But at the very moment that the old scout jerked up his rifle, while his eyes darted a warning to Carlos and the Caddo, a piercing shriek sounded from down the stream, cutting through the evening air, and the hearts of Carlos Courtney and Bald Head.

Instantly exultant shouts sounded on all sides, followed by a crashing of bushes in every direction, as the savages gave up the search, and galloped headlong toward the point from whence the shriek had sounded.

A moment after, the trio of strangely-met pards were alone, silence ruling in their near vicinity, gazing at each other, while they listened intently.

At length the old scout, seeing the look of hopeless despair on the face of Carlos, said reassuringly:

"They air tuck, dead sure, Carlos! Thet we knows; but I sw'ar ter thunder thet they shell be both reskyed, ef hit's in ther power o' us three humans ter do hit! This hain't no time ter mope. Every minut' hev gut ter be chuck full o' brain biz, an' spyin' out ther persish o' things.

"I reckon ther niggers hev, most on 'em, bin sent ter kingdom come, an' t'others air to be tortered. Ef I hain't mistooken, ther red hellyuns 'll camp 'bove ther bend on ther north plain, jist on ther edge o' ther timber, an' 'bout whar yer fu'st lunged inter ther bush.

"But we-uns hed better tie our critters, an' then do some sly scoutin', ter see what ther painted devils aire up ter. What yer say, Caddo?"

"My white brother talk good," was the reply of Creeping Cat, as he quickly secured the jaw-strap of his horse to a limb.

Carlos Courtney threw off the oppressive numbness that seemed to stagnate his blood, and render his nerves and muscles powerless. He sprung to the ground, and securing his horse, stood ready to follow the white and red scouts; upon whom he knew well that his own life, and the lives of Captain Arundale and Alice depended.

"Leave yer long-shooters 'cached' in ther bushes nigh ther critters," directed Bald Head.

"Ther guns'll be in our way, an' we-uns won't need 'em. All 'pends on snakin' through on ther sly, es I hes spit out afore. Reckon we'll climb a sizy tree, an' take a peep et ther circus t'other side o' ther timber.

"Come on, boyees! Easy, es if trompin' on aigs!"

The rifles were quickly secreted in the outskirts of the dense thicket, within which the horses had been secured; and all stole cautiously

to the creek, and waded it, their senses strained to detect the near presence of any of the savage foe.

The sun's lower disk was at the horizon line, but its brilliancy was now thrown into the shade by the terrible sweeping flames of the burning prairie; the light from which penetrated the timber, and was favorable to the trio of rescuers.

During the preparations and advance of the three friends to this point of observation, victorious yells, most exultant in intonation, had filled the bottom-timber, and rung from the plain; convincing Bald Head and the Caddo, beyond a doubt, that Captain Arundale and his daughter had been captured by the Comanches.

Had the old scout had the remotest idea of the horrible and most hellish scene, which he and his young pard would be forced to witness, he would not have led Carlos to the border of the bottom; but even Bald Head, accustomed as he was to acts of brutality and torture, inflicted by the savages of the border, was forced to admit to himself that the Comanches had conceived a mode of torture upon this occasion, that left all he had ever known in the shade.

The terrible mental agony which Carlos and himself had experienced, was fated to be continued and increased; from the fact that there was no possible way for them to aid those whose sufferings they were forced to witness.

Upon reaching the large trees on the western side of the bottom-timber, the three men quickly sprung up into the branches, which were thickly interwoven with vines, affording an effective screen.

Upon attaining a considerable elevation, the old scout directed each of his pards to work his way out on the limbs near to himself; and soon all were gazing down upon a grand and awe-inspiring scene.

The grass had been kindled for a mile west of the south-running stretch of the creek, and the evening breeze had been slight, and from the north.

Consequently the flames had rushed southward, working but slowly east and west; in fact, the line of fire had just cleaned the southern point of the bend, where the stream turned directly east, and toward the Rio Llano. The plain, over which the fire had swept was now a black, smoldering, smoky surface; but afar, stretching on each side, were two diverging lines of fire, one consuming the grass westward, and the other eastward and toward the scene of conflict and capture.

Hence, it will be seen that the ground, over which the wagons, the Dearborn, and the Comanches had fled, was as yet untouched by the fire; although the flames were working in that direction.

It has been mentioned that the three friends had heard the screams, and yells of terror and agony, which they knew proceeded from the negroes; and as they gained their lookout, they perceived four of the unfortunate slaves being dragged over the ground by their savage tormentors.

Lariats had been secured to the saddle of the Comanches, the opposite ends being bound fast around the ankles of the blacks. Then the In-

dians lashed their mustangs, dragged the poor fellows at speed over the rank, dead grass, the blades of which cut like knives.

The arms of the negroes were bound fast behind them, causing them most terrible agony, as they were hauled this way and that, amid the triumphant yells of their torturers, which drowned the shrieks and screams of their wretched victims.

The trio of watchers happened to reach their point of observation at the time that the slaves were being bound, and previous to the commencement of their torture; and they had at once discovered the fact that every one of the unfortunate blacks had been wounded before being captured.

The trio, who were missing, without doubt were dead, and beyond the power of their merciless captors.

They were bleeding from their wounds, which were clearly seen by the lurid light of the flames; the broken shafts of arrows projecting, in some places, from their flesh, causing excruciating agony, as they were jerked over the sward by the half-wild mustangs. The scene was horrible in the extreme; the whooping, paint-daubed Comanches appearing in the firelight, more like fiends than mortals—dwellers upon God's beautiful earth!

But, terrible as the scene was, causing the beholders in the trees to clutch the branches more tightly to maintain their hold, while they grated their teeth, and vowed vengeance, over and over again—it was to be rendered ten times more so, before the close of the tragic act.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TORTURE.

A SWEEPING eager gaze over the plain and along the margin of the timber up and down the creek had proved to the watchers in the trees that neither Captain Arundale nor Alice were within view. Doubtless, they decided, the Comanches had bound the white captives within the thickets; and as they could not see or hear anything of them their attention was chained upon the poor slaves, the sight of whose suffering was heartrending, and promised no hope or mercy for the whites should they not be rescued.

Along the border of the timber, to the south of our three friends, were two-score of Comanches still seated in their saddles; and their mustangs panting after the laborious chase and search through the undergrowth for the captives.

These braves—save the mark!—were watching with looks of fiendish glee a dozen of their fellows who were engaged in the torture of the negroes, as has been described.

Opposite to these Indians were laid the blood-smeared corpses of another dozen of their number, who had been slain by negroes and Captain Arundale. At the extreme southern end of the line was a burly Indian, whose eagle-feathers and ornamented equipments proclaimed him a chief; and as the trio in the tree scanned the scene below they saw this plumed chief ride along in front of his warriors, giving gestures and

signs, and pointing from the tortured blacks to the thickets.

With loud whoops a dozen braves sprung from their mustangs, tossing the ends of their jaw-strings to their comrades, and then plunged into the woods.

Carlos gasped for breath and trembled as if stricken with palsy as he cried out:

"They are going for her—for Alice! They are going to torture her and her father! Do not try to prevent me, Bald Head; for I swear that I will hurl myself among these demons and perish battling to save her!"

"Don't make a condemned idget o' yourself, Carlos!" returned the old scout, with some contempt. "Ye're off ther trail right smart. Ther reds ain't a-goin' ter tortur' white captives ontill they 'roves et tha'r village, whar the squaws an' young-'uns kin hev a show in ther circus. Hey, Caddo? Ain't thet solid?"

"Comanche no torture white chief, no torture white squaw here," asserted Creeping Cat, decidedly. "Wait till trail end at village. Bald Head, he know heap. Talk good. Carlos, he on war-path. Put on war-paint. No be like squaw. Squaw no good on war-path. Waugh!"

The latter ejaculation of the Caddo indicated as much surprise as the Indian usually manifests, even on most extraordinary occasions; and it caused Bald Head to turn his head about quickly toward the main body of Comanches, the point upon which the gaze of Creeping Cat was directed. Carlos did so also. To the amazement of both, they discovered the dismounted Indians lead from the timber six mules still in harness and attached to a wagon, and no sooner was the vehicle free from the undergrowth than the braves not engaged in holding fast to the prancing and affrighted team tore off the wagon-tilt from the hoops, and then hurled the freight-boxes and bales out upon the ground.

This done, the mules were forced out upon the plain, in the vicinity of the party of braves who were torturing the negroes; one warrior speeding ahead and conversing with those who were dragging their sable victims over the sward.

Immediately the air became filled with exultant yells, and the poor blacks were freed from the lariats and then hurled into the empty wagon. Several Indians then bounded in and secured them in a standing position; one to each of the four oaken hoops which had supported the tilt.

As this was being done, the mounted Comanches near the timber, who were not engaged in holding the horses of their mates, galloped up and down the stream, stationing themselves at intervals a pistol-shot from the timber.

That some diabolical plan was about to be performed, to torture the slaves to death, the watchers were positive; yet neither the Caddo nor Bald Head could even guess at what it was.

Not long, however, were they to remain ignorant. But ignorance was, at that time, bliss indeed; for suddenly every negro's scalp was slashed from his head; and amid their screams

of agony and despair, all the Indians sprung away from mules and wagon, bounding toward the timber.

The frenzied animals, with terrified snorts, sprung southward at headlong speed, the wagon-body lurching from side to side, thus causing the bound and bleeding blacks to be doubly tortured.

Then it was that the hellish plan of the red fiends became known to the watchers in the tree, for the mounted braves along the line from near the south point of the flames to the north point sprung from their mustangs and stooped amid the tall, dry grass.

At once the click of steel and flint sounded along the crescent of warriors, soon followed by little flashes of fire. Then the Indians bounded into their saddles and lashed their animals toward the timber.

The little spurts of flame spread from right to left, meeting and forming a wall of fire extending in a curve, and stealing over the plain toward the old wall of fire that struggled east to meet it.

Thus it was that the frantic mules, the wagon, and its bleeding, tortured load of wounded negroes were within an oblong section of grass-grown sward, dry as tinder, surrounded by fire, the same approaching a common center, the unburnt space decreasing each moment.

Our trio of friends were appalled with horror at the terrible sight, and the fearful shrieks of the tortured blacks cut them to their souls, yet they were powerless to aid them in any way.

An awful doom, indeed, was to be the fate of the slaves of Arthur Arundale.

Like demons exulting in the tortures of the lost, the hellish horde of Comanches dashed along the verge of the timber where the grass was green, and filled the air with their taunting and exultant outcries.

The intense heat caused our friends in the tree to crawl back further amid the foliage, for the whole western and southern plain soon presented but a roaring mass of flashing flames and black, smoldering waste.

From one side of the oblong space to the other galloped the maddened mules, covered with foam, their tongues hanging from their jaws, and their eyes distended with terror. Back and forth, from side to side, the raging flames surrounding them thus, speeds the doomed team, with its doomed human freight.

And they—the tortured negroes? But the sight, the thought even, is too terrible!

And yet our trio of friends were forced by a dread fascination to gaze down upon them!

While the ill-starred slaves were being thus whirled from side to side—while the flames became nearer and nearer, hotter and hotter, a simultaneous whoop from the Comanches, who had congregated to the south of the tree in which our friends were perched, drew the attention to the latter.

Turning quickly, all saw Captain Arundale and Alice bound fast to the forward seat of the Dearborn, the vehicle being drawn and pushed through the undergrowth by four savages.

"God in Heaven! where is Thy mercy?" cried out Carlos Courtney, in a voice of anguish and apprehension. "Come, Caddo!—come, Bald

Head! If there is any man in the composition of either of you, follow me to the rescue! We can but die, and before we do, we can send many of the red fiends to their long account."

"Don't yer stir a peg, Carlos!" said the old scout, quickly, and decidedly. "Ther cusses ain't a-goin' ter sen' ther Cap an' Miss Allie inter ther blaze. Not by a jugful! They're goin' ter hev ther satisfac' o' 'bleegin' 'em ter gaze on ther tortur' o' ther niggers; thet's all."

"By heavens! I should think that was enough," exclaimed the young man. "Alice cannot stand much more of this horror and brutality. She will die of fright. Do you tell me that we are to lurk here, and witness all this, without making a move to aid or rescue them?"

"Ther only way yer kin take a han' in this hyer game, air ter shove yerself in fer a subjec' o' tortur'," asserted Bald Head, quietly.

"Ef yer'll only trust ter me an' Creepin' Cat, we'll get ther leetle gal and Cap 'way from 'em, ef hit air sot down up 'bove ter be did. We're standin' on a shaky place, an' liarble ter be bagged et any minut'. Everything 'pends on we-'uns."

"Ef we makes a brash move, an' misses throwin' ther right keerd, Allie an' her dad air goners. Wait, as ther Caddo says; wait ontill ther time comes ter bloody biz on our side. I 'lows hit a awful hellish sight ter gaze at; but hold on a bit, Pard Carlos. When they hears our whoop-er-ee, thar'll be somethin' drap; an' hit'll drap hard, an' ter stay!"

The Dearborn was turned about, and the captain and his daughter were thus obliged to gaze on the horrible scene before them. The upper portion of the wagon was all that they could now see above the flames, as the mules dashed hither and thither, with shrieks that were almost human, drowning the horrible outcries of the poor negroes.

Captain Arundale groaned and trembled, while poor Alice, already deathly sick with horror and dread, gave a piercing scream, as she realized the terrible fate of their faithful slaves.

The cries of the maiden were heard distinctly, above every other sound, by the watchers in the tree; and Carlos Courtney nearly fell from his high perch, in his excitement and fury. In fact, he was saved from a tumble, and consequent exposure to the Comanches, by the clutch of Creeping Cat, who sprung upon the branch to save his white friend.

But this dreadful scene could not long continue.

The hissing flames roared on, flaring at times, as the breeze, grown stronger, after sunset, blew forks of fire to the very earth; igniting the scorched grass for a long distance, like powder, and then springing upward, until the space between the two walls of fire, was but fifty yards in distance, the heat so intense that the shrieks of the sufferers were heartrending.

High in air bounded the frantic mules, tearing loose from their harness, jerking the wagon-pole from its socket, and then darting hither and thither for a moment until blinded by smoke and heat. At last, their manes and tails were on fire, and the poor beasts staggered and fell, the greedy flames enveloping them.

The wagon stood but a moment after the mules broke loose. One agonizing shriek came simultaneously from the tortured blacks, then the wagon itself burst into flames, and all was over.

No living thing, human or brute, was on the plain.

Death had come in mercy and ended the inhuman torture of both man and beast.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FATE OF THE SPY.

THE paint on the body and wheels of the wagon had long been scorched, the wood-work heated through; and, when it burst into flame, a pillar of fire shot upward to a great height.

Then, as the Comanches realized that their victims were dead, that no further torture could be inflicted upon them, they all gave a far-sounding yell, and the chief rode here and there, giving orders in a quick-spoken manner, and interlarded with vigorous gestures; for the Indians were now getting a slight share of the torture themselves, even the border of the plain being like a heated oven, and the mustangs showed signs of ungovernable fury.

Quickly the Dearborn was pushed back into the bottom-timber, Alice still senseless, and Captain Arundale, now tortured with self-reproaches for not having listened to and profited by the advice of Bald Head when on the east side of the Llano.

Now, when it was too late, the captain saw how foolish and foolhardy he had been. He saw that the terrible death of his slaves, and the present dread captivity of himself and his daughter were due to his own rashness in persisting in his advance into the wilds, when assured by one who knew that they were filled with disaster and death.

His bodily sufferings, too, were excruciating.

The torturing thongs, bound fast as he was, cut into his flesh; but this was as nothing compared with the self-condemnation and horror, which the thought of having brought his loved and innocent child to such a fate, gave him—a fate of which he feared even to think, lest he might go insane.

He now suffered from the terrible heat, and from having witnessed the fearful death of his slaves who had been so faithful, who had acted so bravely when encompassed by the savage foe; but these agonies were also as naught to the pangs that shot through heart and brain when he gazed upon the limp form and senseless face of his daughter.

Shudders of dread horror convulsed his frame, as the paint-daubed demons pushed the vehicle back into the bushes, while their snake-like eyes glared gloatingly and exultingly upon the beautiful, but drooping form of poor Alice.

Not for a moment did he dream there was a friend to him and his within many days' journey of him. Still less, that Bald Head, and a young man whom he had latterly hated, besides a friendly Caddo, were gazing from the top of a tree upon him and his child, and had witnessed the awful scene upon the plain.

Had he known that these three determined, brave, and daring men were on the watch, ready and eager to save him and his daughter from a terrible fate, he might have had more hope; but, as he was ignorant of this fact, his mind was filled with black and hopeless despair.

When the Dearborn, with Alice and the captain, disappeared in the undergrowth, Bald Head, Carlos, and Creeping Cat quickly made their way to the inner branches of the tree; and thence, still further by the interlocked limbs, to a position near the creek, where the air was comparatively cool. As they gained this position, the old scout mopped his perspiring face and bald head, by vigorously rubbing his sleeves over them; then he tore off a chew of "nigger-head" tobacco, glaring furtively meanwhile at Carlos, anxious to speak, and yet at a loss what to say.

A mixed stampede of thoughts rushed electric-like, through his brain; in fact, all three had been so deeply impressed, so terribly affected by the awful happenings of the evening, that they were utterly at a loss as to the first move that they ought to make. The Caddo, however, appeared bent upon immediate retaliation, and an attempt at the rescue of the captives; the helplessness and beauty of Alice, though seen by him only from a distance, having impressed Creeping Cat with a longing to effect her release, and to avenge the brutal usage she had received at the hands of her captors.

The horrible death of the negress had also awakened the ire of the friendly red-man, which was not thought strange of by Bald Head; as he knew that the Caddo, when wounded while fighting hostiles with the Rangers, had been attended by the slaves at the ranch whither he had been taken to receive surgical aid and nursing.

"Bald Head," burst out Carlos, suddenly, in a strange and unnatural voice, his blood-shot eyes fixed upon the old scout, "I should be relieved and pleased to have you express yourself upon the situation of affairs. I confess to being unable to reason, or define any definite plan of proceedings; so appalling, unexpected and horrible have been the strange events since we reached this stream, but little more than an hour ago, that my brain is completely dazed.

"My concern, and dread apprehension, in connection with the captives, unfits me for concocting any line of action; as well as my ignorance of the manners and character of the painted, yelling demons below, other than what I have seen this evening—and, God knows, that is enough in regard to their merciless cruelty and brutality!

"In the name of justice, innocence, and virtue, what is to be done toward the release of poor Alice Arundale?"

"Pard Carlos," returned the old scout, in a sympathetic voice, "I know 'bout how yer mus' feel, fer I sw'ar I never hed my ole gizzard so nigh bein' ruptured es ter-night!

"Ther salt water hev bin tryin' ter bilge outen my peepers, ever since I see'd Allie on ther skute wi' ther mules over ther plain; an' I'm ready ter pitch in on a roarin', ragin', cut, slash an' shoot deal, whenever ther's a show ter come out ahead in ther game, an' sweep ther

Cap an' ther leetle gal clean outen ther Curmanch' camp.

"Howsomever, thar's too much blaze on the perrarer, fer ter make a move without gittin' our heads skinned. What I ses air this: when ther dark comes, we'll smell 'roun' down b'low hyer fer chances. Thet's what ther Caddo hev bin sayin' all 'long. Wait hev bin his word; but, by ther 'pearance o' his peepers, I'm inclernated ter persume thet he's a-gittin' his hyderphobic up, an' I'll hev ter put ther breaks onter him, 'stead o' yeou, es I hes bin doin'.

"He's gittin' up a strong appertite fer Curmanch' bleed an' ha'r, fer I've see'd him clutch et his sticker purty offen o' late; an' his fingers air itchin' ter claw ther feathers an' sculp o' thet big chief what's a-galervantin' an' cavortin' 'roun', bossin' ther bloody biz.

"Don't yer fret, Carlos; hit'll pay ter lay low, fer when we-uns does lunge out, dang'd ef hit won't be a onhealthy time fer some o' ther painted bellyuns down b'low! Ef ther Caddo gits too eager ter squat hyer, I reckon I'll 'low him ter drap down a vine, an' try a leetle o' his creep toward ther critters, jist ter see how ther nags air gittin' 'long; fer I'll own up I'm gittin' kinder narvous, on 'count o' leavin' 'em when thar's sich a heap 'pendin' on hoss-meat."

CHAPTER IX.

ONE DANGER REMOVED.

THE young man perceived, from the words of Bald Head, that at least an hour more of anxious and torturing delay must elapse, before any movement could be made with safety toward the rescue of the maiden.

A glance over the plain assured him of this, and he shuddered, as he caught a view through the branches of the tall pillar of bright flame. This, he knew, was the wagon—the funeral pyre of the poor slaves!

An increased commotion to the south of their position now drew the attention of the trio. The shouts of the Comanches, the lashing of quirts, and the crashing of bush predominated over everything.

"What in ther devil's goin' on now?" burst from the lips of the old scout as he leaned forward, craning his neck, in a vain effort to gain a view through the thick branches.

"Comanche cut mules from wagons," asserted Creeping Cat decidedly. "Drive to plain over creek. Camp soon; then kill mule; cook on fire; eat heap; yell heap. Glad get boxes, get bags, get everything in wagons. No go on war-path till sunrise. Got plenty plunder. Go back to village. Creeping Cat thinks so, says so. Comanche squaws; Caddo he warrior. Take heap scalp before sun come. Ugh!"

The Caddo jerked his knife as he closed with the grunt-like ejaculation, which, coupled with the merciless, revenge-craving look in his black eyes, proved that his threat would be carried out to the letter—barring accidents.

"Dang'd ef yer doesn't 'pear ter hev sifted things out ter bottom fac's, Caddo!" answered Bald Head, with relief and satisfaction in his

voice and manner. "Thet's 'bout what ther condemned kiotes 'll do. They hesn't any idee o' thar bein' a human hyerabouts, 'ceptin' the'r-selves an' thar captives; fur they s'poses thet yeou, Carlos, gut up an' dusted on a cyclone stompede.

"Howsomever, they'll not linger 'bout hyer arter sun-up, fer they'll think you've skuted ter Fort Mason arter ther 'long-knives' (cavalry).

"They'll make a break fer ther village up-country by daylight, an' pack ther mules wi' ther plunder, calkerlatin' ter hev a big circus, torterin' ther cap'n an' spreadin' ther tricks, what they hes kerral'd, 'fore ther squaws an' ole bucks. Ef we-uns doesn't break up thet leetle 'rangement, I'll crawl inter a perrarer-dog hole an' draw ther hole in arter me, an' lay low thar until Gabri'l toots his horn—dang'd ef I doesn't!

"I am beginnin' ter get a leetle off my kerbase with bein' 'bleeged ter squat an' fold my arms through ther hull hellishness, which ain't sing'lar; fer not hevin' any thatch on my cranium ter perfect my brain-box, things strikes me brash-like on a suddint. A leetle ole he-fight 'll sot me all hunk, though. Whar in thunderation's ther Caddo?"

Carlos Courtney turned about in surprise, both he and Bald Head having been gazing toward the south and downward listening to the confused hum and crashing of bushes.

Creeping Cat had been just in their rear astride of a limb; but his place was now vacant, neither was he to be seen below in the branches or the undergrowth, all in that direction being silent.

"He heerd what I said 'bout ther nags," explained the scout, "an' he's levanted ter see ef the critters air O. K."

Carlos instinctively glanced toward the point where the animals had been left, and then along the course which he and his friends had pursued to reach their lookout on the border of the timber, and he started quickly, peering downward.

Arrows of lurid light from the fires on the plain shot through between the undergrowth and the lower branches of the trees, but the upper boughs, within which our friends were ensconced, were in dark shade.

Only for an instant did the young man peer downward. Then he laid his hand on the arm of the old scout, and quickly pointed below them.

Bald Head, following the direction indicated, instantly detached a long lasso from about his waist, giving a hiss of caution; and with rapid movements secured the noose-end about his body, tying a knot to prevent the same from slipping too tightly.

He then fastened the other end about the limb upon which he sat, keeping the slack in coil.

This done, the scout jerked his bowie-knife, placed it between his teeth, and, with but a slight grunt, swung off, going, hand under hand, down the swaying lariat.

Carlos, filled with the utmost concern and apprehension, peered downward, following every movement of the old scout with his anxious gaze, and prevented from moving even a finger

by his knowledge of the hazardous mission of his friend.

Without the slightest rustling of the branches, the old scout continued his descent, watching closely below, and keeping the lariat between his legs until the slack gave out, and he was suspended within five feet of the ground, on the border of a thicket; not daring to detach himself, or to place his feet upon the earth, in the semi-darkness, for fear of alarming his intended victim.

But a moment did he remain thus, when a dark figure darted around the thicket, and was immediately clutched in the vise-like grip of Bald Head.

What Carlos Courtney had discovered was a Comanche examining the rank bottom-grass, which had been trampled when he and his two friends had run to their post of observation, after leaving their horses, there being sufficient light, in places, for the Indian to trace them.

If this brave were permitted to return to his fellows, then all would be lost, for the bottom would be alive with searchers in five minutes. Or, if the warrior should give the alarm-yell, the result would be the same.

This Bald Head knew, the moment that he fastened his eyes upon the sneaking red spy; and he proceeded at once, in the manner we have described, to prevent the alarm and search, by killing the lurker.

All was still, and the Comanche dreamed not of the near presence of the foes, whose "sign" he had so unexpectedly come upon. His quick rush around the thicket proved this conclusively.

Bald Head was no novice in the work on hand, and he instantly clutched the brave by the throat, at the same time driving the point of his knife into the back of his victim's neck, and parting the spinal bones and cord. Death was instantaneous.

The scout uttered a low grunt of relief and exultation, severing the lasso from his waist at the extreme end of the loop, in order to save as much of it as possible.

Quickly he attached the end of the rope to the belt of the brave, being forced to hold the corpse upright to accomplish this. Then he sprang into the branches and upward, saying as he reached the side of Carlos:

"Grab a-holt ther lariat, an' help ter jark ther carkiss up'ard! I doesn't giner'ly leave no 'sign' ef bit kin be helped; 'specially when I air in a ticklish place like this, when everythin' 'pends on layin' low, an' workin' under ther bush."

In a moment more the limp corpse of the Comanche brave was bound to a branch of the limb upon which our friends sat; the soulless, glassy eyes seeming to stare toward the burning plain, while a delicate ray of light struggled through the foliage, lighting up the paint-daubed, hideous face!

One danger, and that not a slight one, had been removed from the path of Carlos Courtney, and of his red and white pards.

CHAPTER X.

WITH THE CAPTIVES.

CAPTAIN ARUNDALE had directed his daugh-

ter to jump from the Dearborn as soon as the mules dashed into the bottom-timber; but, as the frantic animals plunged onward, he realized that if Alice made the attempt, she might be thrown against a tree-trunk and killed, or at least hurled to the earth with such force as to render her senseless.

A glance behind him proved to him that he would have time to cross the creek before the yelling horde reached it, and this decided him upon a different course of action.

Spurring onward, he again yelled:

"Don't jump, Allie, until I can reach you! Then bound into my arms, and, God helping me, I will save you, my darling, from the red fiends!"

The features of the captain were so changed by his terror and anguish, as to be scarce recognizable, and his daughter appeared on the point of fainting; but she gazed into his face with a look of hopeless despair when he called to her. His words, however, were almost undistinguishable, being drowned by the hellish whoops of the exultant savages, who now believed that the whites would surely fall into their power in a few moments more.

Only about twenty paces intervened between the lead-mules and the border of the undergrowth, when Arthur Arundale drove spurs for a grand spurt ahead, to save his much-loved and only child, he being almost beside himself, in his self-reproaches at having been so cruel and selfish as to almost literally drag her from home, comfort, and friends, to the frontier, to be plunged at once into horrors, and most probably to be doomed to a fate too awful to contemplate!

The consciousness that he was the cause of her present fearful sufferings and danger nerved the captain to superhuman efforts; and as the mules bounded into the undergrowth with snorts of terror, he caused his horse to spring upward and forward.

Alice, understanding his intention, she clinging to the side-bar of the vehicle, placed her foot forward, and bounded into the arms of her father, whose horse was going at terrific speed.

Clasping one arm about his daughter, Captain Arundale jerked up his horse just in time to avoid being dashed against a huge limb. At the same instant, the Dearborn crashed against a tree-trunk, the pole snapped off, and the affrighted mules dashed away into the shades, crashing through the undergrowth.

"Thank God!"

This ejaculation burst with deep meaning and feeling, from the captain's lips, as he realized the narrow escape his daughter had had; and also the great danger in which he himself had been, of having his brains dashed out against a limb.

But there was not a moment's hesitation in the desperate man's movements; for he turned his horse to one side, and spurred madly toward and through the creek, and then up the bank on the east side of the stream. Alice clung about his neck, trembling and speechless with horror, as the yells of frantic rage rung through the timber, on the discovery by the Comanches that their intended victims eluded them, at the very

moment that they had expected to find them at the wreck of the Dearborn.

Then it was that the military experience of Captain Arundale came into use.

He saw at once, that to proceed on through the timber upon the eastern plain would be madness; as his horse, double-laden, would soon be overtaken by the red pursuers, if not maimed by their arrows; and that, should he proceed down the stream, through the dense undergrowth, the crashing of his horse through the bushes would be heard by the Indians, and then all would be lost.

Not only this, but the savages would have every advantage, and his horse was unaccustomed to traveling in such a manner; the animal already having proved that it was averse to proceeding through the undergrowth, by springing aside frequently in such a manner as nearly to unseat him.

He saw at once, then, that escape by either direction was impossible; and that but a short time could pass before himself and his beloved child would be surrounded by the yelling demons. These thoughts flashed instantly upon him, and he, noticing the advantageous position he held, as he caused his horse to bound up the east bank, decided at once to hold the same, for a time at least.

He reasoned that, could he bring the Indians to a halt, by killing some of their number, and thus necessitating them to a slow advance through fear of his fire-arms—that, by turning his horse up-stream, on a run through the bushes, and then stealing with Alice down the stream amid the thickets, they might evade capture.

This seemed a reasonable mode of proceeding, especially as night was approaching, and darkness would soon fall upon the earth, and thus cover their flight toward the Rio Llano, or Fort Mason.

No sooner had this project darted through the mind of the captain, than he gently lowered Alice to the ground, saying:

"For God's sake—for your own sake, and for mine—Alice, my poor child, be brave! Take the bridle-reins, hold to the horse, and stand firm here until I join you.

"I shall be but a few paces behind you, and I shall fire upon these painted fiends and check pursuit. Then we will dash into the shades and down-stream. It is our only hope.

"May Heaven forgive me for bringing you into this fearful danger! Kiss me, darling. If I fall, do you fly down the creek and secrete yourself until night; you may then speed eastward in safety."

Alice Arundale threw her arms about her father's neck and pressed her cold lips to his brow. Her eyes were glassy with horror, and her tongue benumbed from terror; for the fiendish yells and whoops filled her ears.

The captain tore himself from his child's embrace, clutched his rifle, and sprung into the bushes on the border of the bank up which his horse had but just bounded.

The foremost of the Comanches were at this moment crashing through bushes into the creek, amazed and maddened at the disappearance of their intended victims. Into the middle of the stream they lashed their frantic mustangs; fea-

thers flaunting, long hair flying, wild whoops of war ringing—a hideous, paint-daubed horde.

And, as the waters spattered high under the fast-plunged hoofs, a spurt of fire shot from the green foliage in their front; a thunderous report echoed amid the natural arches of the timber, and the leading warrior threw up his arms. A death-howl burst from his throat, followed by spurts of blood from mouth and nostrils; then his two eagle-feathers, that had proudly flaunted through many a bloody fight, sunk backward, and with a sudden bound forward, his horse hurled him with a sounding plunge into the waters.

With a terrific whoop, the other savages now dashed through the bushes; but, at that instant, flash and bang, burst in front of them, revolver-shots ringing in their ears, while half a dozen of the foremost braves fell dead into the creek.

Mustangs reared, plunged, and snorted, whirling and dashing madly over their dead and dying masters in the shallow stream; some bounding into the undergrowth, with mortally wounded warriors clinging to their manes, the death-song sounding from the soon-to-be-silent lips.

CHAPTER XI.

A CIRCLE OF FIRE.

THE disaster and death were so overwhelming, when it was realized that but a single white man had been the author of them—so unexpected and astounding had it all been, that the horde of pursuers were for the moment almost paralyzed. Soon, however, the Comanches recovered, to be ten times more furious, ten times more eager for captives to torture in revenge for the death of their fellow-braves.

So, on in a mad mob they galloped over the stream and up the bank, scattering both up and down-stream in search of the desperate white man and the beautiful maiden. The success of these two in eluding capture, and the brave defense and strategy displayed by the white man, increasing his consequence as a captive, and their mad desire to torture him.

The sounds of battle between a portion of the war-party and the negroes, deterred not those who were in search of Captain Arundale and his daughter, and only brought forth from the searchers a chorus of exultant yells; as the shouts of victory and the yells that proclaimed the death or capture of the blacks, rung through the bottom.

When the captain fired his last shot, he rushed quickly to the side of his trembling, horror-stricken child, and turning his horse's head up-stream, he gave the animal a blow with his rifle, causing it to gallop away through the undergrowth.

Then he caught Alice by the hand, saying, hurriedly:

"Come, my darling! We must hasten now or we are lost. I have shot down a number of the red demons, and brought the pursuers to a halt, but it will be only for a moment. They will be here soon in frantic rage, thirsting for our blood. Bear up a little longer, and, God helping us, we may escape!"

Worn and weary with the long day's travel beneath the burning sun had been the poor girl when she first discovered Carlos Courtney, and had striven to gain speech with him before the wagons turned the bend, and, after her dread experiences, to which was added the probability that Carlos had been either slain or captured by the Comanches—with all this physical and mental load upon her, it was not strange that the maiden was in a dazed and hopeless state, almost incapable of maintaining her reason or of standing upright.

But the poor girl staggered on after her father, he leading her on through the undergrowth.

Thus the pair proceeded, the rallying-cries, yells of pursuit, and vengeful whoops sounding in their rear, while, from behind the stream, the piercing shrieks of agony from the wounded negroes, who were being slowly tortured to death by their savage captors, scalped and otherwise mutilated while yet alive—all these dread sounds, which might, had she been stronger, have caused Alice to hasten on, now only served to make her more hopeless, and less inclined to strive against a doom that seemed inevitable.

And Captain Arundale himself found that his energies had been exhausted in the awful race for life, the peril of the child, and the excitement of his lone fight with the foe. In fact, he soon found that he would be forced to halt, in place of bearing Alice in his arms, as he had intended.

The shades down the river afforded, what seemed to the captain, secure hiding-places; and he drew Alice into a thicket, threw his empty rifle to the ground, and sunk down himself upon the carpet of dead leaves, clasping his daughter to his breast.

For a moment they remained thus, not a tear in the eyes of either, but their feelings and thoughts beyond the power of words to express.

Alice rested her cheek against that of her father, closed her eyes, and mentally prayed that they might both be taken at once out of the world, while the fiends of the plains, maddened with a thirst for their blood, beat the thicket in search of them.

Suddenly Captain Arundale threw off the deathly and oppressive feelings that had bound him, and began quickly to reload his weapons.

Never was there a loving parent placed in a more agonized and torturing position, the listless manner and hopeless despair of his child appearing like the hand of death upon her.

Neither of them dared speak, doubting if speech were possible, or, if so, fearing lest they should betray their positions, for all around, and dangerously near their covert, was the sound of crashing bushes marking the course of the searchers.

All at once the approach of a horseman sounded in their front, nearing their position rapidly, and the captain grasped his cocked rifle, presented it, and braced himself, Alice clinging to him for protection.

The Comanche dashed forward, his mustang plunging through the bushes, and the tufted crown and paint-daubed face of the rider appeared for an instant; the snake-like eyes dart-

ing downward a look of intense exultation as he drew his bow with a lightning-like motion. At the same time his lips parted, as if to give a signal whoop.

But the whoop never sounded, for the rifle of Captain Arundale exploded, and the leaden messenger of death found a lodging-place in the warrior's brain.

The mustang reared upward, hurling the corpse from the saddle, as it whirled and dashed away, the crashing of the animal and its dead rider through the bushes drowning the approach of another brave coming in an opposite direction.

Perceiving what was ahead and the cause of the failure of his brother brave, the approaching Comanche halted, sprung to the earth, and, throwing himself forward, fell upon Captain Arundale from the rear. The next moment the latter was a bound and helpless captive, the shriek of Alice betraying her capture to the trio of our friends, whose presence was unknown to her.

It betrayed the fact also to the searching Indians, as did the far-sounding signal-whoop of the successful brave.

Soon both were surrounded by the exultant savage horde and taken back on the trail across the creek. They were then bound upon the front seat of the Dearborn, their horror, anguish and despair being soon after increased by being forced to witness the terrible torture of their faithful slaves within that awful circle of fire.

CHAPTER XII.

A RAY OF HOPE.

"DANG an' double dang ther condemned cuss!" said Bald Head, in a manner that showed he meant every word, as he tied the lariat that secured the dead Comanche high up in the tree.

"Ef he'd 'a' hed 'bout two minut's more show ter 'vestergate ther trail, hit 'u'd 'a' bin 'now I lay me' fer all on us; fer he'd 'a' s'pected we war up ther fu'st tree we climbed on ther edge o' ther timber, an' he'd 'a' gi'n a yell thet 'u'd 'a' bring'd the hull caboodle o' painted bellyuns on a t'arin' rampage arter us. They'd ha' cut us off from our nags, skoooped in Creepin' Cat, an' hed ther deadwood on we-'uns."

"Carlos, yer peepers air sharp, an' I b'lieve yer hes ther makin's o' a boss scout inter yer; but hit can't be 'spected a pilgrim kin keep his idees squar' 'mong sich hellishness, when he's fresh in ther biz. 'Speshly not when ther gal he perposes ter pard with fer life air tuck by ther long-ha'r'd, knock-knee'd, smoky sons o' Satan!"

"I sw'ar I wish't we-'uns hed 'bout twenty Rangers hyer now. Ef we w'u'dn't make ha'r fly in ther camp yunder—wa-al, hit 'u'd be fun fer a leetle while fer us, but somethin' else fer ther greasy red heathun. Wonder whar ther Caddo air, 'bout now?"

The old scout spoke in a hoarse whisper, both men sweeping the lights and shades below them with watchful, eager gaze.

"Your words give me an idea, Bald Head," said Carlos, in the same cautious manner.

"Could not Creeping Cat practice the art by which he gained his cognomen and strike out east for help? He could get the commanding officer at Fort Mason to send a detachment of cavalry to our assistance and exterminate these red devils."

"What's 'sterminate mean? Thet's a new-fangled word, I reckon."

"It simply means, to kill the last one of this war-party."

"A—ah! Thet's hit, air hit? Wa-al, 'low me ter asserwate, Pard Carlos, thet ef a crowd o' cavalry sh'u'd lunge inter this camp o' reds, thet cap'n an' Allie 'u'd be 'sterminated ormighty suddint-like."

"Then ag'in, thar ain't nary a cavalry et Fort Mason. All ther blue-coats thar now air dough-boyees, es we calls 'em, what frog hit on a scout, kerryin' toad-stickers on the'r shooters. They takes six days' rations, an' starts on a trail, gittin' over 'bout es much ground in a week, es ther reds put ahind 'em in one night."

"Thar ain't no show ter git captives 'way from ther piruts on ther perrarers, ceptin' by sly scoutin', fer they'll kill 'em on ther fu'st alarm. Hit's pure solid crawl, an' cyclone dash when yer ain't s'pected, thet knocks a red offen his balance. Hit's playin' tha'r own game on 'em, an' ther dang'd fools thinks nobuddy else knows enough ter sarcumvent 'em on ther underbrush biz."

"What does all this confusion among the Indians mean?" asked Carlos, his manner proving that his attention was bent toward the south, whence the crashing of animals, and yells of the savages proceeded. "I am tortured to the borders of insanity by this inaction of ours. My friends may be murdered while we sit here, without an effort to save them."

"I hes tole yer thet ther red-skins 'll take 'em ter tha'r village, an' I means an' knows hit. Thar ain't no use in gittin' worrytated an' flusterated, fer thet'll only take ther vim outen yer, an' yer'll need hit bime-by, ormighty bad, I reckon."

"Ther torterers air es mad es a rattlesnake in dog-days, arter bein' stirred up with a thorn-bush. A heap on 'em's been laid out cold, I knows by ther yelps they gi'n. Ther cap'n air a ragin' roarer when he gits r'iled, an' he's too good a human ter be scarified inter kingdom come by a pack o' greasy kiotes."

"Why he holds a grudge ag'in' you, Carlos, I can't see, but ef he doesn't cotton ter yer afore this biz air over, I'll chaw bugs fer grub ther nex' six moons. Ther or'nary red skunks air packin' ther mules wi' ther plunder o' ther wagons—thet's what makes ther rumpus. They air chuck-full o' glad ter find out what a big haul they've raked in; but they bu'sts out onc't in a while."

"Come ter think, I'll skin this hyer one's head et onc't. I war too short o' breathe, arter thet rope performance to do hit then."

Without further words Bald Head proceeded to scalp the dead brave, Carlos turning away his eyes in disgust, but making no other protest against the barbarous act, for he knew that words would be useless.

The fully round moon now rolled upward in the eastern sky, which was clear of smoke, the

wind having veered around more to the eastward.

It seemed to the anxious, tortured young man that years of horror had passed since he had, a few hours previous, emerged from the timber to gaze upon the blood-red sun and crimson sky to the west, over the grass-covered plain; and he felt that death would be preferable to passing through such experiences again, strong in mind and body though he was.

The mental agony he had suffered racked his heart and brain; forced to remain inactive during the terrible scenes, when his darling Alice had been in such fearful danger, and the knowledge that she was now in the power of those brutal savages, whose hellish character had been revealed to him in such a horrible manner—all this so preyed upon his mind, that for some time his mental condition was deplorable.

But, he was now undergoing a change. He was being transformed into a state of mind that bordered on desperate recklessness, causing him to be insanely eager for revenge, determined to rescue Alice and her father, or to perish in the attempt, and this without more delay than was necessary to its accomplishment.

And thus we will leave Bald Head and Carlos, awaiting the establishment of the Comanche camp, and follow Creeping Cat, the Caddo, who, as the old scout had inferred, had suddenly become anxious in regard to the safety of the horses, and had stolen away silently amid the thick branches, thence to earth, and on to the thicket, within which the animals had been left.

To the satisfaction and relief of the Caddo, the horses were quietly nibbling the twigs from the bushes, and he slipped the bridles to relieve the beasts somewhat, knowing that the rattle of the bits would be more liable to be heard by any Comanche who might approach the thicket, than the sounds made by the animals in grazing.

No sooner had Creeping Cat done this than he stalked from the little opening, and stood for a moment, erect, straight as a forest pine, listening intently to the din further down the stream, separating each sound, analyzing and interpreting the same. The inactivity which he had been forced to maintain, when with Bald Head and Carlos, had been as irksome to him as to the young man last mentioned, for his hatred of the Comanches was most intense—indeed, a Comanche scalp was prized by the Caddo more than aught else on earth.

Much had his tribe suffered on account of their having signed a treaty of peace with the whites, and accepted a reservation on the Ouachita River, having been several times pounced upon while hunting buffalo, by the hostile Comanches, and nearly all of the hunting-party slain, or taken to the Comanche villages on the Canadian, in the Pan-Handle, to die deaths of terrible torture.

To such had Creeping Cat been doomed, when Bald Head rescued him from the torture-stake, at the risk of the scout's life.

CHAPTER XIII.

CREEPING CAT'S COMMUNICATION.

FILLED, in consequence, with intense hatred

and a thirst for revenge, besides being gently desirous of doing all in his power to aid in releasing the captives to favor his white brother, Creeping Cat resolved to practice the cunning for which he was noted among his own people and the Texan Rangers, in ascertaining the exact condition and position of the two white captives; he having, as has been mentioned, been greatly impressed, even at a distance by the extreme beauty and daring bravery of Alice Arundale. For the Caddo had seen the young girl in the Dearborn, as she flew from the Comanche war-party.

Creeping Cat well knew the extreme peril of the attempt he was about to make, but he hesitated not; resolving that, if but a single brave discovered him, that brave should not have time to betray his presence by a death-yell.

With supple movements, Creeping Cat stole from thicket to thicket, his agile form winding, snake-like, amid the tangled bushes and vines, until the sounds ahead warned him that he was in close proximity to his hated foes.

Then he sunk to the earth, amid the rank weeds of the bottom, and proceeded more slowly and cautiously; soon discovering, much to his satisfaction, that he had happened to point his course directly to the Dearborn—that, in fact, the vehicle was within ten feet of him, its side close up to the very thicket within which he lay outstretched.

The Caddo wormed his way, yet more stealthily, as he well knew that the rustle of a bush on that side of the vehicle might alarm the captives; who, in their surprise and excitement, might betray his position.

However, the friendly red-man came so near, that by reaching forward, he could place his hand upon the wheel of the Dearborn, without causing the slightest rustle of the undergrowth.

For a moment he lay perfectly still, then he parted the bushes so slowly that no watching eye could have detected the movement; moving the twigs aside, only sufficient to allow his sharp and glittering eyes to dart glances upward to the forward seat of the vehicle.

To the further satisfaction of the Caddo, he saw that the captives were still bound to the seat.

The captain was upon the further side; but so filled with horror, anguish, and concern, and so tortured with the agony produced by his tightly-drawn bonds, that he seemed, but for his staring eyes, more like a corpse than a living man.

Thus thought the Caddo, and well he might, for Captain Arundale had become so utterly despairing and hopeless that he could offer no word of consolation to his daughter, and the poor girl's thoughts were of Carlos Courtney—though his name she dared not mention—and who, she was almost positive, had been slain by the Indians. Yet sometimes, the hope that he might yet be alive was uppermost, and she prayed that he might be enabled to reach the nearest military-post, and secure aid.

That which caused Alice Arundale to believe that her lover had been killed, was the fact that he had disappeared in the timber as she turned the bend; and the savages had evidently been within the shades at the time.

Had he escaped, she reasoned that he would have found some means of assuring her that he was working for her liberation; yet this seemed impossible for him to have accomplished during the terribly exciting occurrences of the evening.

Strange to record, it was at the very moment when Alice was pondering as to what manner and means Carlos could employ to notify her of his presence, that the hiss of the Caddo sounded in her ears, just below her, and from the thicket.

This first slight signal of the presence of something living so near to her was, however, unnoticed; for she suddenly thought that, even if Carlos had escaped death or capture, he could know nothing of her presence in the neighborhood.

He had not seen her as she came around the bend; and, if he got alarmed at the presence of the Comanches, he might have dashed up the creek, under cover of the timber, and escaped. In that case, he would know nothing of the capture of the wagon and Dearborn by the Indians; or, if he had witnessed it from a distance, the flame and smoke would have prevented him from recognizing the "outfit" as that of her father's.

All this flashed through the maiden's mind, rendering her more hopeless. The Caddo again gave a hiss of caution. This, too, was heard by Alice, who turned her wondering eyes, so glassy, and filled with so much anguish, misery, and despair, to the point whence the strange sound proceeded.

The face of the Caddo was revealed to her, within a framework of foliage; his hand being first pressed over his mouth, and then held forward open, the palm toward her, in token of peace.

But this she understood not.

All she could see was, that an Indian was gazing upon her, and she shuddered convulsively; but there was something in the hideously-daubed features that impressed her favorably.

The fact that this red-man was endeavoring to attract her notice and attention unknown to the others, seemed favorable; and yet it appeared to be impossible that any good could emanate from an Indian—her recent dread experiences being enough to cause this decision.

Consequently there was never a human being more astonished, to say nothing of being filled with joy unutterable, than was Alice Arundale when from the vermilion lips of the lurker issued the one word:

"Carlos!"

The sudden change in the face and eyes of the young girl proved to the Caddo that all was well—that he could depend now upon the discretion of the white squaw. In a low voice, scarcely audible, indeed, he said, in explanation:

"Creeping Cat is no Comanche—Creeping Cat is Caddo. He friend of Carlos, friend of Bald Head. Old scout in tree; Carlos in tree. See fire. See kill black men—see all. White squaw wait. Bald Head, Carlos, Creeping Cat all wait.

"Soon get white squaw, get old captain chief from Comanches. They no kill, no torture,

when Creeping Cat can lift knife. Wait. Good-by. It is good. Creeping Cat must crawl. Tell Carlos, tell Bald Head. Wait."

Open-mouthed, her eyes staring into the Caddo's face, dumfounded at the totally unexpected and joyous revelations, Alice was speechless for the moment. Then, when gasping for breath, to her great amazement and regret she perceived that the friendly Indian, whose words had proved his character and loyalty, was gone.

Turning to her father she said, in a husky and unnatural voice, that caused her a great effort of will to articulate:

"Oh, papa! Oh, thank God! they are coming—coming soon to help us!"

Captain Arundale turned his head quickly, and gazed into his daughter's face, his own being drawn with intense agony and apprehension.

Then a deep groan burst from his lips, for he believed that his child had succumbed to horror, pain and terror, and had gone mad.

"Oh, papa!" she cried again, "do not look at me in that manner. Listen to this glorious good news. Bald Head, the scout, is lurking in the forest with help. We shall be saved, thank God! Oh, thank God!"

"Why can you not believe me, papa dear? A friendly Indian—a Caddo—has just left the thicket at this side of the Dearborn. He told me all this, and then vanished. He told me, I tell you! Creeping Cat told me that Carlos lived!"

Wild vehemence marked the speech of the young girl; and as she ended, her head sunk forward, her face became corpse-like, her eyes closed—the poor, overtaxed maiden had once more fainted.

Again a groan of deep anguish and despairing apprehension burst from Captain Arundale, for he believed that his child's brain had become unsettled at last.

CHAPTER XIV.

COME!

CREEPING CAT, after stealing away from the vicinity of the Dearborn, gained a position to the east of the crescent-shaped space, within which the captives and the wagons had been drawn by the mules, under the direction of the Comanches.

The sudden departure of the Caddo from the side of the Dearborn was prompted by the wild look in the eyes of Alice Arundale, and her very apparent excitement; he fearing that her first words after gaining power of speech, in her intense relief, joy and surprise, would be an outcry that would draw attention to the Dearborn, and culminate in his being discovered.

After gaining quite a distance, he at great risk to himself, gained a point from which he could observe the entire war-party in their work of plunder.

He was near enough to the captive to decide that Alice had fainted, and that the captain was in a state of great anxiety on her account.

The Caddo judged that the maiden had not informed her father of his visit, and the news that he had communicated.

That the young girl had been so overwhelmed with relief and joy, when naught but death, and that in a most horrible form, seemed to be her fate, the Caddo believed; and taking her recent experiences into consideration, bearing in mind that white squaws were not as strong as red squaws, he did not think it remarkably strange.

However, he felt assured that the maiden would soon recover, and he congratulated himself on having left the Dearborn so hastily; for a Comanche brave, even while he gazed, strode to the vehicle and examined the bonds of the captives, being forced to plunge through a portion of the thicket in which he had so recently crouched, to ascertain the condition of the cords upon the wrists of the senseless maiden. When the Comanche perceived that the white squaw was senseless, the look of admiration with which he first regarded her, changed to one of contempt; for the absence of fortitude in their captives invariably produce the latter feeling among the braves.

Creeping Cat watched the proceedings of the Comanches but a moment, for the mules, now heavily packed, were being driven toward his covert on their way to the river.

Stealing over the stream to the margin of the timber, the Caddo lay in wait till all the mules that had been harnessed to the wagons passed his position; the captives being in the rear, and bound each upon one of the mustangs that had been ridden by some of the slain warriors.

Creeping Cat was now positive that, not only did Alice understand and appreciate the information he had communicated, but that she had informed her father; for he noticed a great change in the bearing and expression of each.

This was as it should be, and the Caddo, after waiting until the last mule, mustang and Comanche had passed around the bend—from which Alice had first discovered Carlos—stole through the now dark shades to the thicket in which he had left the horses, well satisfied with the result of his self-imposed mission.

Five minutes later, both Carlos and Bald Head, who were still in the tree-top, puzzled by the cessation of all sounds where they supposed the war-party to be, received a most astounding start of astonishment.

This was the single ejaculation—"Waugh!"

It was delivered with not a little amazement in expression, and extreme emphasis, and seemed to come from the supposed dead Comanche, as if the latter had suddenly returned to life, and was astonished beyond measure at finding himself in such a predicament.

It was quite dark at that particular point, there being not a ray of moonlight to relieve the black depth of foliage, and as probably no human being is without a certain amount of superstition, it was not strange that Carlos Courtney and the old scout were considerably startled. They turned their bodies and faces quickly toward the point where the scalped Comanche was bound to the limb, and from whence the sound had proceeded.

"What in thunderation an' dangnation air

thet? Dang'd ef thet red hain't come back ter Texas!"

Thus cried out Bald Head, before he had time to reason that the Comanche was as dead as Julius Caesar.

"For Heaven's sake, kill him before he yells," exclaimed Carlos, hastily, "or we are lost! I don't believe I can find him, it's so infernally dark."

A snake-like hiss now proceeded from the same quarter, which pierced the brain of Carlos like a knife; but the next instant the scout burst into partially suppressed laughter, his efforts to control his mirth causing the limb upon which he sat to shake violently.

"What does this mean?" demanded our young friend in mingled indignation and alarm. "Are you going insane, Bald Head? The dead coming to life, and the living going mad—after this night of horror, I shall be surprised at nothing!"

"For God's sake, let us get down from here and act! Disaster and death are in the very air."

Carlos rattled these words off rapidly, yet they seemed to have no effect on his pard. Bald Head was still convulsed with spasmodic mirth.

But before the young man could again frame words to express his indignation, a cold, icy hand fell through the darkness, down over his face.

Carlos Courtney was paralyzed with horror.

He was incapable of movement or speech for the moment, and it was fortunate that it was so, for the voice of Creeping Cat, low, sneering, and somewhat indignant, broke upon his ears:

"Do my white brothers roost in the trees, like turkeys, when the war-path is open?"

"Wa-al, I sw'ar! Somebuddy lariat me ter this hyer limb, er I shell tumble an' break my ole neck, an' hit hain't long enough ter tie ag'in."

"This hyer ain't a trail thet calls fer laugh, I'll 'low; but consarn my peculiar pictur! I'd hev ter smile out loud, er bu'st, even if I war going ter my own funeral, ter hev sich a rich joke come 'roun'. Caddo, yer puts a heap o' in-cerence inter yer gab. What did yer run ag'in' jist now, es yer kim up so ormighty sly?"

CHAPTER XV.

"HIDE IN BUSH, QUICK!"

THUS spoke Bald Head, his words relieving Carlos, who now understood the cause of their superstitious fright; which he saw the old scout was attempting to repudiate, as also did the Caddo.

"Why Bald Head no kill Comanche again? Then mebbe so, he no give old scout scare."

Bald Head began to perceive that there was no use in his pretending not to have been startled, or that he had not really thought for the moment that the dead had come to life.

"Wa-al, Caddo," he admitted, "I'll give in thet I war sot back, an' who c'u'd 'a' helped bein' thet-away! I warn't thinkin' jist then 'bout yeou; an' I sw'ar, afore I c'u'd git my idees squar', I war dead sure ther Curmanch' war' comin' roun' hunk, an' ready ter fight

hefty ter git back his sculp. Carlos war in ther same box; but, I'm gamblin', Caddo, thet yeou war ther wo'st surprised o' ther three of us. Now, spit hit out plain."

"Creeping Cat climb up like panther. Make no noise. Hear no noise. Think mebbe so Bald Head gone on trail, Carlos gone on trail. Then put hand on Comanche face in dark. Face cold. Hand feel blood. Creeping Cat say 'Waugh.'"

"Quick for think Bald Head killed. Think Carlos, he killed. Think Comanches been here when Caddo on trail. Creeping Cat no see. Then he smell. Know it not Bald Head, for no smell tobac'. Know it not Comanche, for feel belt, feel moccasins. Then hear Bald Head laugh. Make Creeping Cat heap mad. How Comanche come up tree?"

Carlos related the circumstances connected with the dead Indian, and then asked, somewhat impatiently:

"Where have you been, my red friend? And what news do you bring us? What means the silence, where but just now all was noise and confusion?"

"Ask Creeping Cat too much at time," returned the Caddo.

He then stated what we already knew in regard to his spying trip; both the whites listening in amazement, and with much satisfaction.

Carlos grasped the hand of the Caddo, when he had concluded, and wrung it in thankfulness.

Creeping Cat ended his narration by asserting that the Comanches had departed up the creek, with all the mules and plunder, the two captives being taken along in the rear.

Bald Head now settled down to sober, earnest counsel, saying:

"Yer hes done well, Caddo, es yer alwis does! I tole yer, Carlos, thet Creepin' Cat didn't ever creep fer nothin'. He's on the make every time he sticks his paw for'ard, an' he leaves ther blindest trail o' any human red er white I ever run ag'in'."

"Things air gittin' straightened out fer biz, an' I'm ormighty full o' glad ter know thet Allie an' ther cap'n hev bin tole 'bout my bein' on ther trail, wi' ther Caddo. I sw'ar I shell hev ter tell ther boyees, down San Antone-way, 'bout my dead Curmanch' surprisin' ther Caddo!"

"But, es I jist spit out, hit's time fer biz, an' one thing worrytates me, which I reckon hev struck yeou, Caddo. Thet air 'bout this hyer condemned skunk, what I hed ter send inter kingdom-come on ther whiz, er hev hed our gravy spilled."

"Ef ther bellyuns misses this hyer cuss, an' s'pects thar's somethin' rottin' 'roun' hyer, hit'll make 'em put a double guard on ther captives; 'sides sendin' out spies arter 'sign,' an' ter find ther corpus. Think 'bout hit, Caddo, eh?"

"Creeping Cat no care what Comanche do. No care what Comanche think. Bald Head had to kill spy. Mebbe so Comanche think black men shoot him, then he crawl into bush and die. No look for him till sun come. Mebbe so. Mebbe not so."

"Wa-al, anyway thar ain't no use slingin' gab. Ther cap'n an' ther leetle gal hev gut ter be saved. Come, pard, let's glide down onter

solid dirt. I'm cramped an' stiff, from roostin' so long on a limb."

"If you had not decided as you have, Bald Head," said Carlos, "I should soon have disappeared, as Creeping Cat did; and like him, have gone on a lone scout. I cannot remain inactive no longer. I am feeling more desperate, and furiously more revengeful every moment."

"Now that Alice knows I am in the timber, and within a short distance of her, she will look for aid every moment. Suffering as she does I would be less than a man, did I not hasten to do all in the power of man, and at the risk of my life, to relieve, and rescue her."

"That's all very nice sort o' gab," said the old scout, as the three men stood together at the base of the tree; "but hit doesn't count in this hyer game. Ef yer throws yer life away, yer throws ther cap'n an' Allie's likewise—thet is, ef ther Caldo an' me war sich blamed fools es to rush in 'mong ther hellyuns, like a pa'r o' roarin', ragin' nincompoops!"

"But, I doesn't go fer ter say thet ther Caddo's word 'wait,' comes in now, fer hit's a more open trail; but we-uns must glide easy."

"Thet's hit—'easy' air the word. Whar in thunderation air our nags? I've lost my b'arin's. hit's so ormighty dark; though I sees ther moon shoots down a-glimmerin', hyer an' thar, toward ther creek. We'll—"

The hand of the Caddo, quickly clapped over Bald Head's mouth, prevented further speech; just as a peculiar yell sounded from down the stream, where the wagons had been left.

This was followed by a shriek of terror that was most agonizing to hear.

"What in Tophet has broke loose now?" exclaimed Bald Head, in an apprehensive whisper.

"Come—hide in bush, quick!" directed Creeping Cat. "Comanches they run through bush—no time go round bend. Black man run when heap fight. Hide in bush. Comanche count wagons—count black men; some kill, some burn up, one he gone!"

"Spy, he now find. More torture. Comanche heap glad. Keep still—her Comanche come. Creeping Cat know signal—Creeping Cat say, 'wait.' Tongue straight—no fork."

There was no time for comment or for questioning; the manner and voice of the Caddo proved this.

Carlos and the old scout followed their Indian pard into the bushes and vines about the huge tree-trunk, the surrounding objects being now much clearer, the moon being higher in the heavens.

All crouched, knives in hand, although not intending to use their weapons unless obliged to do so.

Not long had they to wait. Soon, darting through the bushes and along the paths made by wild beasts, came at least a dozen Indians, all speeding in a scattered line down the creek.

"In the name of justice and humanity," whispered Carlos Courtney in Bald Head's ear, "is there no way for us to save that poor slave from torture?"

"I doesn't reckon thar bees, without gittin' tortur'd ourselves," was the reply. "Howsomever, I'm inclernated ter try hit on—er et

least, ter kinder smell 'roun' down below, an' 'vestergate things. What d'yer say, Caddo?"

"Come!" was the laconic reply.

All quickly glided through the dark shades, careful not to make the slightest sound as they passed.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE RESCUE OF THE BLACK.

BEFORE the three pards had gone half the distance between the tree within which they had been perched, and the position of the wagons, the shrieks and groans of agony, in advance of them caused them to hasten their movements, which were necessarily slow as they presumed that other braves might come from the camp up-stream at any moment, and should they be discovered all hope of rescuing the captives would be at an end.

Bald Head, as they went on, was anxious in the extreme, fearing that Carlos or Creeping Cat might be imprudent and risk all when excited by the unexpected scene of horror, in an attempted rescue of the black teamster.

The old scout knew well by the outcries that the Caddo had stated the truth in his interpretation of the signal-whoop of the Comanche spy.

Nearer and nearer, the trio of desperate men proceeded toward the dismantled wagons, guided by the shrieks of terror and pain that were shot out by the poor negro, in his helpless, hopeless despair. Soon they reached the border of the cove-like clear space where the mules had been packed, the southern side of which was illumined by the moon, as was also the wide fire-scorched plain to the southwest.

This last presented as unearthly a broad vista as had been viewed the previous evening by Carlos; but it was entirely opposite in its character, everything being now of as inky hue, instead of a brilliant, fiery red.

Upon glancing out from the undergrowth Bald Head and Carlos were so struck by the scene before them that each gazed spellbound over the grass-grown space, which, from being near the stream, had escaped the fire.

The stoical face of the Caddo, however, expressed no feeling but that of hatred and revenge, and so strong was it that with difficulty was it kept under control.

On the verge of the timber opposite the position of our friends, and within twenty paces were the Comanche braves, two of them holding a negro, one clutching him by each arm. The eyes of the poor wretch were bulging out in horror, as he watched the preparations for his death—a death by torture the most fearful, the nature of which he undoubtedly understood.

The remainder of the party, six in number, had made good use of their time since arriving. Two saplings had been trimmed from the ground up, these being on the border of the timber, and some twenty feet apart, which was also about their height.

To the tops of these supple saplings lariats had been secured, and the same drawn downward together, forming a double arch, which was held thus by the six savages.

It was at this stage of the proceedings that our friends arrived opposite the red-men and their appalled black victim. The quick movements of the Indians proved that they wished to perform their appointed duty as expeditiously as possible, in order that they might join their fellow-braves at the camp, who were doubtless engaged at this time in dividing the plunder and indulging in the highly-prized tobacco which had been found in the wagons.

The movements that followed convinced both the old scout and Creeping Cat that the negro would not, at the present time, be tortured to the death, but would be suspended in an agonizing position until the entire war-party could be present to enjoy his dying shrieks.

A lariat was severed, and a portion of it was secured about each ankle of the terrified negro; then the shrieking wretch was clutched by the braves and reversed in position, an ankle being attached to each of the ends of the saplings. These were now released by the warriors, and the poor negro, who supposed his time had come, was jerked into the air, hanging head downward, his arms bound at his back, and his limbs stretched outward from his body in an unnatural position, causing the most excruciating agony.

With yells of exultation the Comanches now ran across the clear space, passing quite near to our concealed friends, plunging into the undergrowth and hastening through the same up the creek toward their encampment, while shriek after shriek resounded through the bottom from the terribly tortured suspended negro.

But, although the poor wretch dreamed not of help or release, except by death, succor was near; for, as the Comanches disappeared, Bald Head, Carlos, and Creeping Cat sprung from their place of concealment, and with knives in hand, bounded toward the tortured slave.

Not one of them had spoken, all seeming resolved upon an immediate release of the sufferer; the departure of the Indians convincing them beyond a doubt that the Comanches had no suspicions of there being enemies in the vicinity, or of the death of the spy killed by Bald Head.

Creeping Cat and Bald Head immediately grasped the lariats which were wound about the saplings from the tops to very near the ground, and unwinding them, endeavored to pull down the negro. From the fact that the ropes had been left in such a way, our friends knew that they had decided correctly, and that the Indians intended more and deadly torture to the negro upon their return.

Finding it impossible to pull down the saplings sufficiently to release the black, the Caddo and Bald Head exerted themselves to the utmost, and then Carlos, with his knife in his mouth, climbed to the swaying end of one of the young trees and freed the ankle of the negro. Catching a view of the pale face of Carlos Courtney, the poor wretch cried out:

"Bress de Lor'! Bress de good Lor'! Mars' Carlos done come an' save Tom from de red debbil!"

The combined exertions of the trio on the single sapling now bent that to the earth, and in a twinkling poor Tom was cut free from the tree,

the bonds that held his arms were severed, and he stood before his preservers, trembling from head to foot.

His manifestations of gratitude, were, however, suddenly hushed, as Creeping Cat stood before him, the amazement and apprehension of the negro being highly appreciated by the Caddo. The latter thrust out his hand, grasping that of Tom, as he said:

"Black man no like red-man. Some red-men heap bad. Some not bad. Me, Caddo, Creeping Cat. Me hate Comanche. Kill, scalp heap black man. He wait, see heap fun when Creeping Cat get on war-path."

Somewhat reluctantly, Tom returned the shake of the Indian, not understanding half that the latter had said, but the words of the old scout banished the last remaining suspicion from his mind.

"Tom," said Bald Head, "thet's a pard o' mine, ef he air red; an' thar's a heap 'pendin' on him. I don't reckon we'd ha' glided hyerways, ef he hedn't lunged out brash, arter he see what war up."

Bald Head and Carlos now allowed the saplings to spring back to a perpendicular, the latter retaining a hold on his rope, and the slack of both lariats being secured to the trunks of the young trees.

"Now, Tom, how'd yer manage ter save yer bacon ontill all yer pards war roasted, er laid out cold?" questioned the old scout.

"Mars' Bald Head, I see'd dat de hull outfit war done gone up, an' I crawled in de bush; but dey chucked a arrer inter dis chile's arm. Den, when I war dead sartain de red debbils had lef' fer good, I done poked my head outen de bottom, an' gut knocked blind."

"When I 'roved 'roun' squar' ag'in, I foun' I war tied fast, an' a painted Curmanch' standin' side o' me with a knife. Then, I tell yer, I jist yelled fer good. But, bress de good Lor'! I done gut cl'ar!"

"Wa-al, Tom," said Bald Head, "yer hed a purty close shave; but I reckon thar'll be a show fer yer ter git even wi' them. Ther cap'n an' Miss Allie air in ther Curmanch' camp, an' liarble ter be tortered afore long. We'll g'in yer a chance ter carve red meat. How's Tom's wounds, Carlos?"

"He's all right, or, he will be, after a profuse application of cool water. He got a hard knock on the head, and an arrow through the fleshy portion of his arm. Nothing serious, however. He's better than a dozen dead men yet."

Tom was speechless, in his distress at learning of the capture of his master and young mistress; and, as the negro was a very powerfully built man, he was considered quite an acquisition to the party.

"Now," said the old scout, with much anxiety, "we-uns are boun' ter git our p'ogramme bu'sted, ef we doesn't work lively. Ther condemned ha'r-tearers 'll know thet thar's some-buddy on ther trail, an' they'll be skutin' lively up crick. By savin' Tom, we've risked chances on ther cap'n an' Miss Allie."

"That is most certainly the case," agreed Carlos; "but we could not leave him to suffer, when there was an opening to rescue him. It

would have been inhuman. But, for God's sake, Bald Head, what is to be done now?"

"I'll sw'ar I doesn't 'zackly know! Caddo, ole pard, scratch yer sculp an' think lively. How we goin' ter git things on ther move ag'in, toward ther resky o' ther cap'n an' ther leetle gal, from thet big bunch o' hellyuns. Ef some on 'em come back hyer, they'll know we-'uns bin 'roun', an' our job's bu'sted, sure an' sartain!"

"Tom, he no cunning like fox, like red-man," asserted Creeping Cat. "Yell heap now, like he tortured, or Comanche come."

"Thet's so; dog'd ef hit ain't! Tom, let out a screech now an' then, an' do yer bestest," directed the old scout.

The negro complied at once, giving a long-drawn scream of mimic agony.

"Get dead Comanche from tree. Hang up, like black man. Then braves think Bad Spirit here."

Bald Head gave a low whistle, saying:

"Gi'n me Creepin' Cat fer sharp tricks! What a ole nincompoop I air gittin' ter be. Thet's jist ther idee. Come on, Caddo! Tom, glide ter ther creek, an' wash ther bleed, an' yer wounds, an, git ready fer biz; fer hit's comin'—bet yer sculp! Carlos, keep a eye out hyer ontill we-'uns gits back. Me an' Creepin' Cat kin manage ther corpus."

With no further words, Bald Head and his red pard darted up the stream, after the body of the spy that had been slain by the old scout; and Tom, guided by Carlos, proceeded to the creek.

In fifteen minutes more the dead Indian was suspended head downward from the saplings, exactly as the negro had been; but even this precaution was, after deliberation, considered by the trio as of little benefit, for Tom could not keep up his screams of mimic agony after they should set out for the Comanche camp. The poor slave actually trembled with terror, when it was proposed that he should remain near the corpse, and give out occasional shrieks, while his friends should make an attempt to steal into the camp and rescue the captives.

They therefore found themselves in a quandary as to their future proceedings; but they were not men, even when thus situated, to hesitate for any length of time.

"Boyees," said Bald Head, ejecting a squirt of tobacco-juice spitefully up-stream, "we-'uns hes gut ter make a move speedy, er thar'll be a long trail ter foller arter ther red skunks an' ther captives. Ther fu'st thing arter ther cusses finds out we're hyer'll be ter sen' some o' ther bucks skutin' up-country wi' ther cap'n an' Allie, an' then ther t'others'll glide roun' ter kerral us an' gather our ha'r."

"I reckon we'll move toward the critters easy-like. Come on, Tom! I'll gi'n yer ther bow, arrers, an' sticker what b'longed ter thet kiote what's tuck yer place on ther saplin's. Reckon yer'd felt some bilious, an' hed a rush o' bleed ter yer brain-box 'bout now, ef yer hedn't bin cut loose."

"Gi'n another boss screech er two, an' then we'll git up an' t'ar brush."

Several unearthly screams were shot out by Tom, with more vim than he before exercised,

as he now felt greatly relieved both mentally and physically, especially since he knew that his preservers had decided that he should accompany them.

Filled with terrible dread he would indeed have been had he been left alone with the corpse, expecting the return of his torturers at any moment, but when with the Caddo and the two white men, his confidence and bravery were such that he wished most sincerely he might dash by their sides into the very midst of the savage horde, and while avenging his fellow-slaves' deaths and his own sufferings, be instrumental also in rescuing his master and his young mistress.

This famous quartette, resembling each other only in bravery and their present object, soon reached the horses; passing the tree where the scout had slain the Comanche, and securing the weapons of the dead brave for the negro.

The bridles were adjusted, and Carlos immediately ransacked his saddle-bags to procure some salve and a strip of linen, with which to dress and bandage Tom's arm. This humane intention brought about a slight accident, which, however, was destined to be of great benefit to the rescuing party.

It was dark in the thicket, and Carlos had cast his saddle-bags to the ground, and was about to examine them for the articles mentioned; and, while pouring a canteen of water over the arm of the negro to remove the fresh blood the water fell downward, directly upon one side of the open saddle-bags. This was not noticed, however, by Carlos, and, as all were now waiting for him and Tom, their faces were naturally turned toward them, their forms being just discernible in the darkness.

After Carlos had dressed the wound he, with some haste, proceeded to return the box of salve and other articles to his saddle-bags; but gave an ejaculation of surprise and regret when he discovered that they had been saturated with water.

Suddenly, as Carlos was thus engaged, the Caddo gave out a guttural "Ugh!" in extreme wonder and astonishment. The old scout, his voice manifesting the same emotions on a larger scale, cried out:

"What in thunderation an' dangnation air thet? Hev yer gut some essence o' Tophet boxed up in yer saddle-bags, Pard Carlos?"

Our young friend raised his hands upward with a cry of amazement, and Tom sprang backward, bursting out in affright:

"Gor A'mighty, Mars' Carlos! What am dat?"

A pale, ghastly, phosphorescent flame played back and forth over the palms of the young man's hands for a moment, and then gradually died away.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE COMANCHE CAMP.

"BOYS, I have wet all my matches!" exclaimed Carlos, suddenly realizing the cause of the strange, unearthly flame. "That's what's the matter. Look here, will you?"

Thrusting his hand again into the saddle-bags, he drew out a pasteboard box, which was thoroughly saturated with water. Tearing off one end, he drew it over his palm a couple of times, and then rubbed his hands together.

The result was strange and startling in the darkness, Carlos seeming to be washing his hands in fire—a most peculiar fire, that emitted a strong smell of brimstone, the smoke issuing from between his fingers.

The observers uttered exclamations of extreme astonishment; the Caddo and the negro appearing to be superstitiously fearful of the unaccountable phenomenon, both being accustomed only to flint and steel.

Tossing off his hat, Carlos quickly rubbed his hands over his brow and cheeks, when the amazement of the beholders was greatly increased.

"Wa-al, I sw'ar ter my granny!" blurted out Bald Head, as soon as he had sufficiently recovered from his astonishment to speak; "yer hes diskivered somethin' a dang'd sight more walu'ble jist 'bout now then a gold-mine. Kin yer rub on 'nough o' thet devil's paint ter stay awhile?"

"Yes, if I wet the matches a little more, and rub the loaded end of a bunch upon my skin a few times back and forth; but this is no time for such nonsense."

"Yer calls hit nonsense, does yer?" returned the scout. "Dang'd ef I doesn't call hit ther bestest diskivery I ever see'd! Hit's proverden-tial yer thought o' fixin' Tom up. Air yer all a set o' nincompoops?"

"Can't yer undercomstan' thet we-'uns kin use thet fer war-paint in ther dark, an' skeer ther Curmanches plum'outen thar breech-clouts? Wa-al, I wish't I c'u'd g'in a ole he yell. Boyees, we hes ther reds foul, an' we kin resky ther captives jist es easy es rollin' off a buckin' mustang."

"Sock some more water onter ther 'rangement, an' gi'n each on us a bunch o' yer new-fangled strikers. We'll show ther cusses somethin'!"

When Carlos fully understood the plan of Bald Head he was greatly elated; and the Caddo, after examining a match, and rubbing it on his own hand, was also quite exultant.

"Heap good war-paint," said Creeping Cat. "Comanche think all bad spirits come in night. Think Bad Medicine in creek bottom. Run fast. Howl heap. No care fight with bad spirits."

"Well, I believe," said Carlos, "that as you say, Bald Head, it was really providential that the saddle-bags happened to catch the water. You must all be very careful, though, and wrap the matches up in damp buckskin; or the phosphorus will betray our position before we are ready."

"Here you are! There is a box for each, and some to spare."

"Fotch along the hull bizzness!" directed the old scout, "fer we kin rub some on ther nags, an' tha'r bridles an' saddles. Fu'st off though, we must get a nag from 'mong ther anermiles o' ther reds, fer Tom ter straddle. Then we'll paint up, an' wade inter ther Curmanch' camp, skeerin' 'em 'bout outen tha'r ha'r an feathers."

All feeling much more confidence in their success than they had previously done, led their horses over the creek to the west side, and then proceeded slowly up the same; aiming to secure a position just opposite the Comanche camp with only the shallow stream and the belt of timber between them and the red foe—between themselves and those whom they had sworn to save, Alice Arundale and her father!

The horses were secreted, Tom being left to guard them, much to his disappointment; but, Bald Head explaining to the negro that they were going to steal a horse for him, he felt more resigned; especially after Carlos and the old scout passed him their rifles, which they would not want in their proposed undertaking.

Leaving Tom on his knees, with one rifle tightly clutched and presented, and the other within reach of his hand, the trio stole away; wading the stream, and crawling from thicket to thicket toward the Comanche encampment, guided by the blaze of a number of fires, and the sounds of guttural conversation.

Well knew Bald Head and Creeping Cat that, although their red foes were seemingly ignorant of any enemies being in their vicinity, they would have sentinels posted around the camp.

Not only this; but the scout and the Caddo were sure that, from the fact that the screams of the negro had ceased, a brave, or braves, would at once be dispatched to learn the cause. For the Comanches were well aware that their captive would not die, unless thus suspended for a long time.

These suspicions led Bald Head and his red pard to proceed forthwith to the down-stream side of the camp in order, if possible, to intercept and slay those who were ordered to repair to the point where Tom had been suspended from the saplings, and investigate the cause of the cessation of his piercing screams.

Possibly they were too late, as some time had passed since Tom had given his last shriek, as instructed; if so, their proposed attempt would be the less likely to succeed.

They had observed a number of horses in a moonlit "open," and they knew that they could lasso one of the animals for Tom, on their return.

Having gained a favorable position, our friends peeped from the bushes, and beheld the Comanche camp before them.

It was situated in a small horse-shoe bend, near where Carlos Courtney had first entered the timber, to cross the stream, and gaze at the gorgeous sunset. A half-dozen fires burned brightly, and a couple of score of Indians were about them, toasting mule-meat on sticks, and devouring the same nearly raw; the carcass of one of Captain Arundale's mules lying near the lurking-place of our friends, and slashed nearly free of flesh.

Flitting about the fires, the paint-daubed fiends appeared more devilish than ever; and the spies knew that some of the warriors must be posted not far from the camp, or with the animals, as guards.

They had no means of knowing the number slain by the captain and his slaves; but they did know that there had been three-score in the war-party before the chase began.

Fully a score, then, of the original war-party were missing; but four of these were accounted for, by discovering that they were stationed as guard over the captives on the opposite side of the camp. Both Alice Arundale and her father were now discernible, being secured to trees, on the border of the timber, but under the shade of the branches; their guards leaning against tree-trunks near them.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"COME ON, PARDS."

JUST at the very moment after Bald Head and Carlos had made this discovery, they noticed that the Caddo had stolen away from them; but before either of them could whisper to the other, in connection with this disappearance, they both heard a struggle in the bushes in their rear—a fierce struggle, accompanied by gurgling and gasping sounds, a heavy fall, and then the sudden plunge and grating of a knife, crushing through flesh and bone.

Both held their breath, in an agony of apprehension, knowing well that the lives of themselves and the captives depended upon the moment; that if the Caddo, who was one of the combatants—of that they were positive—was slain, all was lost. The victor, if a Comanche, would give the alarm whoop, and the bottom-timber would swarm with warriors on the instant.

Arrows and patches of moonlight found their way here and there through the branches, and as our friends gazed a tufted head appeared in a small and moonlit space, and then the hideous face, from which glittering black eyes flashed!—the Indian being upon his hands and knees.

One glance, which was most piercing, proved to both Bald Head and Carlos that they beheld the face of Creeping Cat, and the two men heaved sighs of relief. Hope increased in their hearts.

The next moment their red pard crawled to their side, holding before their eyes a reeking scalp, as he grunted out:

"When Comanche down creek Creeping Cat say wait. Now time come to fight. Too much wait no good on war-path. Caddos all warriors. Comanches all squaws."

"Bully fer you, Caddo! Everything's bunk. Ther cap'n an' Allie air t'other side ther camp. We'll git Tom a boss, then meander 'roun', put on our war-paint o' fire, an' run ther biz ourselves fer a few fleetin' periods."

"My friends," whispered Carlos, in great agitation, "this is terrible! I must immediately make a *detour* of the camp and ascertain if poor Alice is bound in such a manner as to give her pain. When you consider what she has already passed through, you must admit that she cannot be expected to bear up much longer; that further agony and terror must either kill her or transform her into a maniac.

"Perhaps her mind was so much affected when you made known our presence, Creeping Cat, that she did not understand you, and hence she may be now in a state of hopeless despair.

"For God's sake, my friends, let us at once

proceed to the west side of the camp and then make a dash to release the sufferers!"

"Thet's what we'll do, Pard Carlos, without any beatin' 'roun' ther bush, 'ceptin' ter keep hid from ther hellyuns. Come—"

At this instant Bald Head was interrupted by a long-drawn, peculiar yell from down-stream, which seemed to cause the greatest excitement in the camp.

The Comanches threw their toasting-sticks and meat aside, and hastened to collect, at a rallying signal from their chief, in a body near the side of the encampment where the captives were bound.

"Waugh!" burst from Creeping Cat, in disappointed rage and surprise.

"Thunderation an' dangnation!" growled the old scout. "Ef our gravy ain't spilled, I'm fooled right smart. Ther condemned scum, ther painted kiotes hev foun' out ther nigger air swapped fer one o' tha'r own hellyuns, an' now they know blamed well thet thar's more humans in ther crick-bottom than tha'rselves!"

"I don't care what they know!" hissed Carlos, springing erect in his fury. "I shall make an attempt to save Alice, if I have to dash in alone!"

"An' lose yer ha'r, without doin' her any good," returned the scout, impatiently. "Keep cool, an' don't get flusterated, er ther hull biz'll go ter smash, an' all on us git tortered.

"Let 'em b'ile 'roun'. We kin put on the fire-paint, es ther Caddo calls hit, an' try ther circus on 'em, though hit's ormighty risky, since they hes foun' out thar's whites inter ther timber.

"We'd 'a' hed ther deadwood on 'em ef hit hedn't bin fer ther chief sendin' a brave down crick ter see if ther nigger war dead. From ther screechin' stoppin' so suddint like, they must hev suspicioned somethin' war wrong, an' now they've foun' hit out dead sure an sart'in!"

"Caddo, what's ter be did now?"

"Put on fire-paint quick! Get mustangs. Get black man. Make heap yell. Ride fast in Comanche camp. Then shoot heap. Comanche heap scare. Ride fast to captives. Cut from tree. Then lash mustangs down creek. All time make war-cries. Heap whoop. Heap yell. Heap howl!"

"Thet's ther only show ter do ther biz, an' hit must be did on ther jump," agreed Bald Head; "but es I said, hit's ormighty risky. Ther Caddo an' I kin mebbe so stan' 'em off; while you, Carlos, an' ther nigger skupes in ther cap'n an' ther leetle gal.

"Come on easy; fer ther guard air on ther watch, peart an' sharp 'bout now. This ain't no fun biz, I tell yer, but pure, solid death on every hand!"

Our three friends quickly, but with caution, proceeded to return to the opposite side of the stream where they had left Tom; but, as they were on the very verge of the north bank and about to dash into the creek, a Comanche brave, with a startled "Ugh!" sprung from the earth in their very path.

Bald Head and the Caddo both bounded upon the warrior on the instant, their knives flashing before his eyes; but, with a furious backward jump, the Comanche struck into the stream,

while, at the same time, the alarm whoop sounded from his lips.

Barely had the signal escaped the brave, however, when the old scout, with a muttered curse, leaped from the bank upon him.

Then followed a most furious hand-to-hand conflict amid the splashing waters; the clash of knives from which flew sparks of fire, suddenly ending with a horrid sound of steel, cutting through bone and flesh, as Bald Head, with one desperate downward cut, clove the Indian from breast to thigh.

He then tore off the scalp, and hurled the corpse into the middle of the stream; while the camp of the Comanches resounded with furious whoops and rallying cries, and amid them all, the dull tramp of hundreds of hoofs, as the animals were driven in by the guard.

Realizing that he could not assist Bald Head, the Caddo jerked Carlos into the stream, saying:

"Come! Come fast, or lose scalp. Old scout he kill Comanche quick. Bald Head all right in minute."

Almost insane from disappointment, anguish, and increased apprehension, as the din in the Comanche camp struck his ears, Carlos followed Creeping Cat without a word; wading to the opposite side of the stream, where both presented their revolvers, ready to shoot any brave who might burst from the thickets near the old scout.

Soon the latter joined them, crying out, in great excitement:

"Come on, pards! Ther hellyuns air b'ilin' over, an' sculps air loose; but we-uns hev got ther keards ter sling in this hyer game ontill yit!"

CHAPTER XIX.

FOUR AGAINST FIFTY.

NEITHER Carlos Courtney nor the Caddo needed any instructions as to further proceedings, the former feeling greatly relieved at the return to their side of Bald Head, evidently none the worse for his terrific struggle in the creek with the Comanche brave, for Carlos felt that the lives of all depended upon the old scout.

Creeping Cat had, however, seemed to entertain no anxiety on the old scout's account, the Caddo appearing confident that his white pard would be the better man in the fight.

As the trio rushed toward the thicket where they had left Tom with the horses, Creeping Cat, with an exclamation of extreme disgust and self-condemnation, came to a halt, saying:

"Too much heap fuss. Make Creeping Cat more like squaw than warrior. No got mustang for black man. All go wrong—no horse, then Tom he heap scare. Make heap talk. No good on war-path without mustang. Creeping Cat go kill Comanche; get horse. Come back quick. It is good! Waugh!"

Before either Bald Head or Carlos could utter a word in remonstrance the Caddo had disappeared on the back trail amid the thickets.

"Thunderation! dangnation! Tophet and Purgatory!" burst out Bald Head, with fury, as

he squirted tobacco-juice in the direction taken by his red pard.

"Ever since thet nigger gi'n his yelp, things hes bin gittin' mixedder an' mixedder; an' this hyer move o' ther Caddo takes ther pone o' cake, an' I reckon hit ends up ther biz, givin' we-uns an' ther captives a free pass on ther telegraph whiz ter kingdom come!

"Ther red can't git a nag et this stage o' ther game, an' we-uns might es well gi'n him up es a goner. Tom kin take ther Caddo's nag, an' we'll make a big break toward kerryin' out our p'ogramme, even ef we doesn't make ther raffle. We c'u'd ha' left ther nig ahindt in ther bush. Consarn ther luck! Everything's goin' dead ag'in' gittin' leetle Allie an' ther cap'n from ther condemned kiotes!"

"By Heaven, I'll submit to this torturing delay no longer!" exclaimed Carlos. "I shall go mad presently. Hear the red fiends! The whole war-party are ready to receive enemies, I judge and our opportunity is lost—to save Tom, we have sacrificed Alice, Captain Arundale and ourselves!"

These words were spoken hurriedly as the two hastened on, they having no fear of any lurking savages on the south side of the stream.

"Git ther nags ready ter jump, Tom!" yelled the old scout, as they neared the place of concealment that had been chosen for the negro and the horses.

"All ready, Mars' Bald Head," cried Tom! "But, gora'mighty, boss, what's de rumpus, wid de red debbils?"

"Never mind what's the row, Tcm," returned Bald Head, as he grasped his bridle-reins. "Keep ther Caddo's gun, jump his nag, an' git ready ter wade in blood. Keep yer knife loose, an' slash es soon es yer gits through shootin'!"

"All hunk, mars'!"

"Whar's ther fire-paint? Gut hit handy?"

"Dat am all hunky, Mars' Bald Head."

"Souise on some water, an' rub ther stinkin' stuff over yer breast, face, arms, an' han's jist 'bout es quick es yer kin, er our gravy's spilled."

Carlos set to work at once to rub the saturated matches vigorously on his palms, Bald Head doing the same, as did also the negro. They then rubbed the same on the bridles, and over the smooth hides of their horses, not omitting their revolvers and rifles; these preparations occupying but a very short time, during which the confusion in the Comanche camp was plainly heard.

"Ther or'nary, blood-suckin', knock-kneed sons o' Satan thinks ther soger boyees or ther rangers air 'bout ter run in on 'em, or thar wouldn't be sich a rumpus."

Thus remarked Bald Head, who was now busied in putting on the finishing touches; each of our friends being so occupied as not to notice the others.

But at the moment that all were about to spring into their saddles, they each uttered an exclamation of wonder as they caught sight of the horrible appearance of each other; the three being transformed by the waving, moving phosphorus into most fearful-looking objects, like nothing in Heaven or upon earth.

A crashing of bushes, however, brought them to a realization of their danger, but at the same

instant the familiar "Waugh!" of the Caddo burst upon their ears as, upon a half-wild mustang, he dashed into the little "open." His characteristic exclamation expressed consternation the most intense, with actual fright and superstitious terror all blended, although he had been, in a measure, prepared for the strange transformation.

To see Creeping Cat thus affected gave the old scout and Carlos much hope and encouragement.

"Don't stop ter even breathe, Caddo," ordered Bald Head, quickly. "Put on yer fire-paint, an' git ready fer our circus. Mebbe so hit's recorded thet we-uns air ter lunge right inter kingdom come without ha'r, but I doesn't crawfish wo'th a pickeryune.

"What in thunderation did yer skute 'way from we-uns fer? We'd tried ther rifle without Tom. I'm fear'd now we've ruined our chances.

"Splash on ther hellish fire an' come on! I'm gittin' chuckfull of ole he-fight, an' somethin's gut ter drap frequent an' often an' drap hard!"

While the old scout was speaking, Carlos assisted in rubbing the phosphorus over the Caddo; while Tom relinquished the horse of the latter, taking possession of the mustang that had been secured by Creeping Cat, and in a very short time the quartette were ready for their grand charge into the jaws of death—a forlorn hope, indeed.

Four against fifty; and they war-painted and war-gear'd Comanche braves!

However, there were never before seen four more unearthly and terrible objects than were our friends; all covered with that strange, creeping, dissolving, and reappearing fire—so ghastly, awful, and unaccountable to the uninitiated.

Even they, as they gazed at the other, became filled with a nameless dread and strange and appalling aversion, unable to crush down the superstition that it had aroused.

But each felt that hesitation was death; and applying more of this novel war-paint to their palms, they urged their affrighted steeds slowly toward the Comanche camp, wishing to gain the border of the thickets where they had crouched, before they should spur in their grand charge into the mass of savages, already somewhat demoralized from knowing that enemies lurked in the timber, and were liable at any moment to attack them.

There could be no halt made for the purpose of reconnoitering, as their strange appearance, the unearthly fire upon them, would reveal the presence of the rescuers. So all, as soon as they knew they were near the border of the timber, got in line, the four abreast; Carlos having given his rifle to the negro, as he himself had two six-shooters, which he clutched in either hand at full-cock, intended for close quarters.

Bald Head, Tom and the Caddo intended to empty the five chambers of their Colt's carbines of the deadly conical slugs, firing as rapidly as was possible the moment of breaking bush.

"All ready, pards! Wade inter 'em an' keep tergether, fer thet's our only hope o' winnin' in ther game. Cut right through 'em toward ther captives. Then when we gets thar, ef we does,

Tom an' Carlos jump critters, slash Allie an' ther cap'n free, crawl ter yer nags, an' git!

"Tom, yer kin ride ahindt ther cap'n, and hold him onter saddle, Carlos kin take ther leetle gal, an' me an' ther Caddo'll keep ther bellyuns from comin' too close. Ef I goes under, and any on yer gits through with ha'r, say a pra'r, onc't in a while fer Bald Head!

"Ready all! Jab spurs deep, an' yell like thunderation an' dangnation! Git up an' git! Eh—h—h—h—ho!"

At the old scout's last emphatic word all drove spurs home, and the four terrible avengers and sworn rescuers, shot from the thickets into the Comanche camp, with terrific yells and war-whoops; their voices rendered as unnatural and fiendish as was possible.

The Indians were gathered on the west side of the camp, our friends charging in on the east. They were nearly all mounted, and evidently ready for a systematic search of the timber. But hellish and hideous as were the war-painted Comanches, they were as nothing in that line when compared with the terrible quartette, who now shot from the undergrowth with frightful yells.

No sooner were our friends free from the bushes, than their deadly carbines vomited fire; sending the slugs tearing through the massed red-men, five volleys in quick succession, and all being fired during as many bounds of their frantic steeds.

The scene that followed, and the sounds that filled the night air were truly terrific, blood-curdling, and beyond the power of pen or words to describe.

The Indians would have been for the moment, dazed with astonishment at the appearance of four men charging from the shades, so suddenly and unexpectedly upon them; but to see four such hideous and unearthly objects in human form, covered with that strange fire, that seemed to be slowly consuming them, so filled them with superstitious dread and horror, that they were incapable of speech, motion, or action.

Then, when the fire, of another and better known character, shot from the deadly tubes they carried, followed by thunderous reports, the leaden messengers of death hurtling through their ranks, their terror and superstitious horror knew no bounds.

The Comanches were completely paralyzed.

Sbrieks of mortal agony, death-howls, and screaming of wounded mustangs were mingled with the trampling of frenzied steeds in every direction, their hoofs crushing the bones and vitals of their wounded and dead masters; those who survived trying to escape from, they know not what.

This was but for a moment. Then, as the carbines were slung at saddle-horns, the terrible avengers opened a deadly revolver fusilade, and they dashed into the demoralized horde, charging over the dead and wounded, and through the living, toward the timber to the west side of the camp where the captives were secured.

So sudden and unexpected had been the advent of the four avengers, and so unearthly and horrible their appearance, together with the wholesale slaughter that had followed, that not a single Comanche drew bow or poised lance as

our friends cut their way through the war-party.

The horrified survivors lashed their mustangs furiously to the nearest timber, and disappeared with howls of superstitious terror.

Right under the branches, and up to the trees where they had, but a short time previous, discovered Alice Arundale and her father, dashed our friends, and jerked their animals to a halt, Carlos Courtney exclaiming, in his agony and despair:

"My God! I cannot bear it. I shall go mad—mad—mad!"

Not an Indian was beneath the branches.

The cords that had secured the captives to the tree-trunks, yet clung about the same, but were severed, the ends hanging loosely.

Captain Arundale and Alice were gone!

"Thunderation and dangnation! Ef ther condemned scum hain't gut ther best o' us at last, I pass, an' then pass ther deall!

"Somebuddy come an' slash my years off, dig my peepers out, an' then shoot me fer a blind owl! I'll gi'n any red kiote my outfit, hoss an' all, ter scalp me, kinder easy-like; fer I'm sick enough ter puke up my knee-pans an' toe-nails.

"Sarcumvented by red bellyuns et last, arter puttin' up a fine job, stockin' ther keerds on 'em! Pard's, this hyer won't do. We'll be chuck-full o' arrers in two skips o' a big-horn, ef we doesn't levant. They've skuted wi' ther cap'n an Allie up-crick, dead sure!

"We've wiped out a heap o' ther bellyuns, an' what's left 'll be ormighty bilious an' b'ilin' over with hyderphobic indig, es Ole Rock puts hit.

"Drive spurs an' foller me! We're chuck-full o' ambish till yit, an' ther good Lord hes 'lowed us ter skin through a condemned tight place. Come on! I'm hungry fer ha'r, an' I air goin' ter hev hit. Ther leetle gal an' ther cap'n shell promernade ther perrarers es free an' airy es they ever did, er I'll never chaw nothin' fer grubes long es I knock 'roun' on this hyer worl', 'ceptin' rattlesnakes, an' horn frogs.

"Skute up-crick, Carlos, speedy. Thet's whar Allie hev bin tuck!"

Bald Head rattled these words off lively, his tongue running like a cotton-shuttle; while his pards were gazing in amazement and great disappointment, upon the trunks of the trees, and the severed cords by which the captives had been fastened to them.

The words of the old scout were drank in by Carlos, who, like the proverbial drowning man that clutches at a straw, held, with desperation, to any hope whatever, did it only promise, or even indicate, a possibility of saving his darling from the horrid fate that awaited her.

Consequently, before the Indians had recovered from their superstitious fright, and returned to their dead-strewn camp, our four friends had vanished, as suddenly as they had appeared upon the scene.

CHAPTER XX.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

ALICE ARUNDALE di' not recover from her swoon, occasioned by the sudden revulsion from black despair to relief, joy, and hope, until the

savages had unbound her from the seat of the Dearborn; then they dashed water over her head in order that they might be put to less trouble in securing her upon a horse, and thus conveying her to their intended camping-place, more than from any consideration for her comfort or life.

Captain Arundale was in a most wretched condition during the insensibility of his daughter; he fearing from her corpse-like appearance that she was dead.

Her wild and unreasonable words previous to her having fainted, caused him to believe her to be insane, for the idea that help was at hand, as she asserted in so vehement and strange a manner, was absurd. The fact that Alice had said that she had gained her intelligence from an Indian who was skulking in the thicket, went far to convince the captain that his child had lost her senses.

That it was not impossible for Bald Head to be in the vicinity, Captain Arundale admitted to himself; but that the old scout could, in any conceivable manner, assist him and his daughter in their present fearful peril, was simply unreasonable—unless, indeed, he had ridden post-haste to the nearest military station for aid.

From the fact that Alice had mentioned the name of Carlos, for the first time in many months, in his presence—one whom he had forbidden her ever to meet or mention—he was convinced that his loved child had succumbed to the dread terrors and agony which she had suffered since capture, and was hopelessly mad when she had last spoken to him, previous to, as he supposed, her death.

Fully believing that he was now bound beside the corpse of his beloved and only child, whom he had been the direct means of bringing into these fearful wilds and to her death, the state of Captain Arundale's mind may be faintly imagined but cannot be described.

He would have blessed the savage hand that would now plunge a knife through his heart.

So intense was his agony of mind, and so torturing to his brain had been the dread experience of the evening and night—the shrieks of his unhappy slaves cutting through his heart like a knife—that the supposed death of Alice threw him into a kind of semi-stupor. His eyes became fixed upon the deathly, motionless face, and drooping form of his daughter, as she hung forward from the seat, upheld only by the cords that bound her.

He maintained that stony stare, his eyes glassy as in a horrid dream, even while the Indians loosened the thongs from Alice; and not until the savages roughly cast her fair form upon the sward, did he manifest any signs of consciousness, or move a muscle.

Then, however, a heavy groan of poignant anguish burst from his parched lips, and he changed his position as much as was possible, watching with agony-contorted features every motion of the Comanches who were near his child. He feared each instant that he would be forced to witness the scalping and mutilating of the dead form that was so dear, so sacred to him.

But when, under the roughly-splashed water, he discovered that Alice lived—that his fondly-loved child had turned to life, notwithstanding

the probability that she was doomed to suffer worse than death—he thanked God from his inmost soul; and in a pleading prayer besought for her protection and help.

Then he was himself cut loose, and quickly and roughly put astride a prancing mustang, to be bound to the animal, as had been his daughter.

Side by side they rode, their horses led by Indians, over the creek, and through the timber, to the north plain; then along the border of the shade, and up the stream, to the same point from which Alice had perceived Carlos Courtney, and had whipped up her mules in order that she might gain speech with her lover, without her father knowing aught of his presence.

Until this moment, no words except broken and almost unintelligible ejaculations of prayerful thanks, or of solicitude and sympathy, had passed between them. But as they turned the bend, Alice seemed suddenly to recall, not only the late interview with the Caddo, but the fact that she had discovered Carlos from the very point that they were now passing; and these thoughts, or what became, after a moment's pondering, decided realities, she resolved to make known to her parent.

"Oh, papa!" she cried, in a trembling voice that betrayed her weakness and prostration; "did I not tell you, previous to my fainting, that help was near? That a friendly Indian had spoken to me from the thicket beside the Dearborn?"

Captain Arundale looked his daughter in the face in amazement, mingled with the most torturing concern.

"Why, oh, why do you look at me in that manner, papa? I know that I must have told you. It was the sudden beaming of hope, the heavenly relief and joy, that raised me from the depths of despair and horror to extreme joy, which so affected my overtaxed brain as to cause me to lose all sense.

"I repeat now that I did see a friendly Indian; that he told me that himself and the scout, Bald Head, were watching for an opportunity to rescue us, and that one whom you have treated unkindly, through unfounded prejudice, is also with them—the three being ready to jeopardize their lives to save ours."

"I hope, indeed, it may be so; and may God bless them if it is!" said her father, with deep feeling. "Alice, I did hear you assert this news, this most welcome news before; but I believed you were wandering in your mind. I trust that you are right, however, and I do hope and pray that at least you may be saved.

"I have suffered more than I can possibly tell you, since our capture, on account of my being the cause of all your torture of mind and body, by bringing you from our peaceful home to this wild border.

"May Heaven protect you, my child, and save you from these fiends. I could die happy, could I but feel confident that your life would be spared, and your liberty gained. But who is the third man you speak of? He must be brave and generous indeed; but I can see no hope that these three can accomplish our rescue from such a horde of demons. I fear they will sacrifice their lives without being able to assist us,"

"Father," returned the young girl, "I realize with you that we stand upon the threshold of death, and that we can be saved only by a miracle. I realize that, at any moment, the brave men who lurk in the timber watching for an opportunity to save us, may be discovered and slain; therefore, I consider it due to one whom I love, and whom I have loved devotedly for years, to make a confession.

"When you decided to leave our home on Red River and establish yourself in Western Texas, I informed Carlos Courtney of the fact, and he resolved that he would follow us, and at a distance guard us from the approach of the danger which he felt assured we would encounter, and which has overwhelmed us.

"His intention was to hover to the west of our trail, within a day's ride or less, and if he discovered Indians, to warn us. He undoubtedly was not aware that we crossed the Rio Llano and came southward to this stream last evening. But I discovered him from the bend we had just turned, and strove to get speech with him without your being aware of it; but he entered the timber without observing me, and I have not seen him since.

"It was I drove the mules through the creek bottom, thinking to meet him, that I first saw the Comanches. I believed fully that he had been slain, until the Caddo came to the Dearborn through the thickets and informed me to the contrary.

"Now, father, Carlos Courtney is here, and he will save us, or lose his own life in the attempt. Of this I am confident. And I do hope and trust that you will at once acknowledge that he is a brave and honorable gentleman, that your treatment of him has been unjust and uncalled for, and that you will forgive me for having disobeyed your commands and met him in a secret manner. This was repugnant to his sense of honor, and was wholly my fault.

"Say at once, papa dear, that you forgive us both, and that you have greatly wronged Carlos Courtney?"

"Alice," returned Captain Arundale, as soon as he had recovered from his astonishment, "I am greatly rejoiced that it is in my power to grant any request of yours. Having caused you to give up your childhood's home, your friends and lover, to follow me into the wilds—having been thus selfish and inconsiderate, I am, as I have said, rejoiced that I have it in my power to forgive where I ought to ask forgiveness.

"I hope that you are not mistaken, and that Carlos Courtney is indeed near at hand. But I am surprised, beyond expression, at your disclosures, for I truly believed Carlos to be a coward, and it was that belief which caused me to dislike, in fact, detest him.

"If, however, he is here, and if he should be instrumental in rescuing you who love him, and who are loved in return, I can say nothing any more against him. In that case my blessing will be freely given, Alice, and most thankful I am that I can lessen in the least the great misery and suffering that I have brought upon you."

"Oh, thank you, papa! Thank you a thousand times! I do feel hopeful even now, and I

will bear up, or strive to do so, under this terrible ordeal."

"Hope on, dear child, hope on! Though, I must say, I fear we have but little grounds for hope. It does not seem possible that it is within the power of three men to rescue us out of the hands of this horde of merciless demons.

"However, I feel much more resigned, more composed and hopeful. It is a blessed relief to feel that there are those near at hand who are anxious to effect our release. Surely there never were mortals in greater need of help. I do not think that the Indians will leave this vicinity until morning, and our friends may make some strategic movement, undreamed of by ourselves or our captors, that will prove successful."

"I think you are right, papa. The Comanches intend camping for the night. Oh, those poor negroes! Their shrieks of torturing agony ring in my ears. I shall never, if I am spared, and live to be old, forget the horrid happenings of the last few hours.

"Each and every dread scene through which we have passed is photographed upon my mind forever!"

CHAPTER XXI.

ON TO THE STRONGHOLD.

CAPTAIN ARUNDALE groaned deeply, as his daughter referred to the poor slaves, but made no reply in words.

As the fair captive ended her remarks, the horses were halted, and in five minutes the father and daughter were bound fast to trees, in a painful position, being forced to stand upright, with their arms stretched around the tree-trunks, and thus bound.

But both the captain and Alice now felt not a little hopeful, and they glanced around from time to time, hoping to discover some proofs or indications that the trio of rescuers were somewhere near at hand.

When the yell of the negro sounded through the bottom, and some of the braves dashed from the camp, down the creek, toward the wrecked wagon-train, then the captives were greatly filled with apprehension; for they thought that the cry proceeded from one of their friends, and that they were all slain.

Thus were they once more thrown into despair, and the captain relapsed into deep despondency and gloom, to be increased tenfold after the feast of mule-meat, when the signal of the spy down the stream was heard.

They were compelled, then, to believe, without doubt, that their friends had been killed, and they themselves again placed in a trying, most dangerous, and helpless position, with death staring them in the face, as it was before the appearance of the Caddo at the side of the Dearborn.

But a short time elapsed after the signal-whoop from the vicinity of the wagons had sounded—the same having caused the greatest excitement among the Indians—when Captain Arundale and Alice were quickly cut loose, and hurried up the stream by six braves, on foot, this change causing the captives once more to entertain hopes

that help was at hand, otherwise the Comanches would not thus betray a fear of losing them.

Their ankles had been unfastened, and three braves led the way, followed by Captain Arundale, whose arms were bound behind his back, the wrists of Alice being secured against her breast, and she following her father, while the remaining three warriors brought up the rear, all in single file.

The captain had, at the start endeavored to address a word of hope and consolation to his daughter; but a brutal blow across his face, from one of his savage captors prevented this, and warned him not to repeat the attempt. The sound of the blow, and having also witnessed the giving of it, caused poor Allie to cry out suddenly in terror and apprehension, she believing that the Comanches were about to murder her father.

A burly brave at once clapped his hand roughly over her mouth, and urged them onward, along a buffalo-path, which wound in a serpentine way through the bottom-timber; arrows and patches of moonlight serving to guide them on their way.

But a short distance had they proceeded, when a crashing of bushes to their right brought all to a halt, the leading brave giving a peculiar signal, which was answered.

A moment after, all entered a small "open"; and, at the same time, two mounted braves, each leading three mustangs, broke from the undergrowth, and all joined in guttural conversation. While this was going on, the captives were guarded by two braves, with drawn bows, and arrows fitted to the strings.

Hardly had the conversation commenced, interlarded profusely by gestures and signs, which were easily interpreted by the captain as betraying much of wonder and concern, when the thunderous report of the first carbine volley of the quartette of rescuers rung through the bottom, from the camp which they had just left, causing each of the warriors to draw his weapon, and the mustangs to prance and snort in sudden fright.

Close following, rung another and another sounding report, and then came the rattling fusilade of revolvers, the howls, whoops and yells of the combatants—sounds of the fiercest conflict, causing "Ughs" and "Waughs" of amazement and apprehension to break from the throats of the Comanche braves.

They then quickly bound their captives on two of the mustangs; the braves who had ridden the same darting into the undergrowth, in the direction of the sounds of conflict.

Five minutes after the captives were hurried on by the half-dozen braves, up-stream, amid the timber; but they could not advance west, and cover much ground, on account of the winding of the paths that they were obliged to follow.

Thus, on they proceeded, Captain Arundale and Alice again plunged into the most deathly despair, at realizing, beyond a doubt, that succor had been nigh at hand, when they had been removed from the Comanche camp—knowing full well that their friends had made the grand charge to rescue them, and perhaps had lost their lives in the vain attempt.

The din of conflict, and the thunderous volleys, led Captain Arundale to believe that troops had attacked the Comanches; but the character of the attacking party, its numbers, and whatever success they had accomplished toward breaking up the war-party, had availed himself and his daughter nothing.

They were now being hurried toward the stronghold—the villages of the merciless savages, who would be frantically furious at the losses they had sustained through them, and who would undoubtedly condemn them both to an early and terrible torture.

Thus on, through the weird woods, went the unfortunate father and child, both nearly insane from agony, anguish and despair.

Feather-bedizened, paint-daubed braves, in their front and rear, were murderously maddened at being debarred from participating in the fight, and also from being ignorant of the result of the same. These were liable at any moment to be informed of disaster and death at their camp, through some brave dispatched for that duty, and then they would probably at once cut their captives to pieces.

All this, the captain realized, and his condition of mind cannot be imagined, much less described.

CHAPTER XXII.

BALD HEAD'S BREAK-NECK SPEED.

STRAIGHT on, up the creek, dashed the most hideous quartette of avengers and rescuers, the strange, phosphorescent fires playing upon their hands and faces, and equipments, in a most vivid and horrible manner, whenever they passed through the darker shades of the timber.

Most providentially, as they had charged into the Comanche camp, the moon had for a brief time been obscured by a passing cloud, causing their appearance to be doubly infernal; but, from the fact that the Indians were congregated beyond their camp-fires, our friends could take deliberate aim, notwithstanding the absence of the bright moonlight.

The demoralization of the Comanches had been complete, the death and destruction most appalling, when the number of the little attacking party was considered, more than a score being left dead in the camp, and the remainder being scattered, fleeing like frightened sheep in every direction, horror-stricken at the overwhelming and totally unexpected disaster and death, that had been hurled like an avalanche upon them, and from a source that seemed supernatural.

Bald Head, however, knew well, as did the Caddo, that the Indians would soon rally, and recover from their superstitious terror; that they would reason that their foes were mortal, from the fact that they had used firearms.

Consequently the old scout urged his horse at headlong speed, following a buffalo-path, and convinced in his mind that the Comanches, upon hearing the signal yell from down-stream, had decided at once that enemies were within the bottom, and that they were bent upon the rescue of the captives, which decision had caused them to dispatch some of their number, with

Captain Arundale and Alice, up the stream, to prevent a rescue.

The yells of the Indian down-stream had shown them that the negro had, in some way, been rescued from the saplings; and a howl that followed proved that the spy had been slain and scalped. Of course it was impossible that these events could have occurred, unless enemies were near their camp; and, from the fact that a brave had been killed and scalped, and a captive rescued, in their near vicinity, they would conclude that their foes were strong in number—perhaps a detachment of troops.

Thus argued the old scout, and he well knew that, upon recovering from their panic and superstitious terror, and witnessing the destruction and death in their camp, the Indians would be perfectly frantic in their fury and thirst for revenge; and that Captain Arundale and his daughter would be immediately tortured, upon the main party's joining those who had conducted the captives away from the camp.

These last were, of course, ignorant of the character and result of the attack.

Consequently, Bald Head knew that, if the captives were to be rescued at all, it must be before the Indians at the camp had communicated with, or joined their fellow-braves, who had the captain and Alice in charge.

Knowing this, he drove spurs without mercy, Carlos Courtney following, Creeping Cat and Tom bringing up the rear, the muzzle of each horse close to the croup of the animal in its front.

So sudden and overwhelming had been their charge into the Comanche camp, and so frightful had been their appearance, appalling and dazing the Indians, that not one of the four daring men had received a wound.

Carlos and the old scout, as well as the Caddo and the negro, had been astonished and rendered most dreadfully concerned at finding the captives gone; but the former was beside himself with anguish and apprehension, consequently the feelings which ruled the four avengers and sworn rescuers were such as to render them desperate and merciless invincibles.

No body of men four times their number could have stood the charge that they were capable of making at an instant's notice, and not an instant, furiously and desperately-determined as they were, would they have hesitated, had even a hundred Comanches barred their way.

They would, in any event, have hurled themselves upon the enemy, had there been the least chance of saving the two captives from the horrible death which all knew was fated to befall Captain Arundale and his daughter, when the Comanches again should have the sufferers in their power.

On dashed Bald Head at terrific speed, his wrinkled features drawn and contorted with fury, and dread of what awaited the captives, when suddenly, around a turn in the path, dashed the two braves who had just conveyed the horses to their comrades and the captives.

These were on foot, and at a dead run, doubtless having heard the approach of the horsemen, and supposed them to be their fellow braves.

Before the two warriors had sufficient time to think, after discovering the strange and horrible enemies in their front, they were right up at the muzzle of the horse of the old scout, who yelled on the instant:

"Don't 'low one o' ther bellyuns ter git away er we're all up a stump an' checked through ter kingdom-come!"

With these words, and doubtless expecting there were more braves yet to come, Bald Head spurred his horse forward, clutched the first warrior by the hair just as the savage was plunging into the undergrowth, and drove his bowie to the buckhorn in the bronzed breast.

Jerking out the blade he scalped his victim in an instant, and then flung the corpse from him.

The other brave succeeded in making a desperate plunge into the bushes and darkness before Carlos could reach him; but, with a bound, the Caddo sprung from the back of his horse into the undergrowth and dashed in pursuit with a low, deep and vengeful yell—the war-spirit of his people to the front.

If the terrified Comanche had had his sense and reason sufficiently under command to have dropped to the ground and remained still, he would have had some chance to have escaped; but, instead, he plunged toward the stream, betraying his presence in the bushes at every moment, and not far had the doomed brave proceeded when the Caddo was upon him.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE OLD SCOUT'S PLAN.

CARLOS, Bald Head and the negro, listened with concern the most intense, knowing that all depended upon the death of this warrior, and soon they heard the terrific sounds of a hand-to-hand struggle, with the clashing of steel, heavy panting, and the grating of teeth. This was followed by knife-thrusts through flesh and bone and the spurting of the life-current of one or the other over the leaves and bushes.

All held their breath in their intense anxiety, but they were the next moment relieved by the guttural "waugh" of the Caddo, followed by the words, amid the sickening tearing of the scalp from the skull:

"War-path open. No wait more. Heap much fight, heap much scalps. Must have white chief, must have white squaw, if kill all Comanches on big plains. When Creeping Cat go on next war-path, take his squaw. Squaw carry scalps. Heap heavy."

"Bully fer yeou, Caddo!" said the old scout, in a low voice. "We skuped 'em in, an' ther trail's cl'ar. Carlos, we're on ther kerrect skute, es ther two copper-colored skunks a-froggin' hit hes proved."

"What do you mean, my old friend?" demanded Carlos. "Speak to the point! Why does the presence of these two braves on foot indicate that we are on the right course to overtake our friends and their captors?"

"Hit's es plain es ther nose on yer purty picture," returned the old scout. "Ther two ha'r-

t'arers, what we sent on ther fly ter ther Injun heaven, wouldn't ha' bin this-a-way, so fur from thar camp without nags ef they hedn't started from one lay-out o' thar pards ter another.

"I opine thet they've both on 'em hed tha'r peepers friz onter ther leetle gal an' her dad, within a minut' of our firin' our fu'st shot inter red meat. But, come on! Thar kin be no lingerin' on this hyer trail. Ther lives o' ther captives may 'pend on a minut' thet we-'uns might waste in ther perlaver.

"Jump yer critter, Caddo, an' come on! Skute et a b'ilin' stampede, er ther bow-legged bleed-suckers 'll git in tha'r hellish work, an' ther game's bu'sted!"

"For God's sake, lead on, Bald Head!"

This exclamation came from the lips of Carlos Courtney, the instant that the scout ceased speaking.

"Keep yer tongue hopped, or yer'll bu'st ther game yerself, Pard Carlos," spoke the old man, quickly. "Not a word o' chin-music, fer ther red kiotes can't tell when they hear our nags comin' whether we're red or white; without some on yer air dang'd chuckle-headed nincom-poops enough ter sling gab.

"Most likely we kin bu'st in on 'em, without tha'r knowin' hit, ontil hit's too late, though hit's risky ter try a surprise on critter-back in ther bush. Ef they're ridin', peart an' brash, they moughtn't hear we-'uns; thar's so much whisk-in' o' brush, an' trompin' o' tha'r own nags.

"Howsomever, es we-'uns doesn't know how many on 'em thar bees, we'd better glide easy-like, an' git ther drap on ther ones thet air clos't ter ther captives, er they'll jab a knife inter ther cap'n an' Miss Alice et ther fu'st 'larm.

"Caddo, take ther lead. Red ag'in' red, fer sly work, every time."

Carlos groaned in anguish and horror, as the scout spoke of the possibilities consequent upon the Indians discovering their character before they could close in upon the red fiends, and slay those who were near the captives.

The mental torture of the young man was now almost beyond endurance.

With a "waugh" of satisfaction and pleasure at the honor conferred upon him in being chosen to lead the way, Creeping Cat urged his horse to the front and proceeded on at speed, keeping a sharp lookout ahead, hoping to catch a glimpse of the tufted heads, or flaunting feathers of his hated foes as they flitted under a patch of moonlight between the thickets.

Tom, the negro, spoke not a word from the time that his fierce and vengeful yells had sounded in the fight; his eyes staring in all directions, his big woolly head being continually jerked from side to side, and shooting glances behind him, as if he expected the red demons to dash upon them at any moment from these points. All this time, the slave clutched the rifle of Carlos, which had been given them.

Bald Head, after noticing this, no longer feared any attack from behind, without having due and noisy proof of its approach.

For some time our friends thus proceeded, when suddenly, Creeping Cat threw up one arm in caution, and jerked his steed to a halt.

He then pointed forward.

There seemed to be a rise in the ground ahead,

some distance from the Caddo; and, as the latter pointed, Carlos and Bald Head shot keen glances in the direction indicated.

"Dang'd ef we-'uns hain't gut ther deadwood on ther condemned cusses! Keep yer nags still, boyees. Carlos, everythin' hunk. We've jist es good es made ther riffle.

"I'll take a double-bar'led afferdavy thet yer'll hold Miss Allie in yer arms, in 'bout ther time hit takes a jack-rabbit ter hump hitself two miles er so, ter ther bottom, when a eagle air soarin' over hit, ter skupe hit up toward ther blue, fer lunch.

"They doesn't s'picion thar's anybody arter 'em fer biz, er they wouldn't glide thet easy. Does yer friz yer peepers onter anythin' what talks sweet soothin' syrup ter yer thinkin' mer-sheen, Pard Carlos?"

The young man said not a word. He held his breath, and strange feelings, sickening in their intensity, ruled mind and heart.

Away ahead, flitting through bars and patches of moonlight, the branches of the trees and the foliage seeming to be less thick than where they had passed, were the six Comanche braves—three ahead and three in the rear of Captain Arundale and his daughter.

The golden hair of the latter showed plain, as the silvery moonbeams played in its meshes; her head bent forward in listless apathy, as it seemed; or, it might be, in hopeless despair.

Hideous and unearthly appeared the Indian braves; feathers flaunting, and long hair waving up and down with the motion of their animals. The sight caused Carlos to grip his revolver-butts and grate his teeth together, while his eyes blazed with a frenzied longing to dash forward.

"Easy, easy, pard!" cautioned Bald Head; "er ther biz air bu'sted. Caddo, turn yer nag straight fer ther no'th plain. We'll glide outen ther timber, up ther edge, an' git ahead o' the bellyuns.

"Then we'll leave our critters in ther bush an' lay fer ther condemned skum. Thar mustn't be no shootin'-irons used ef hit kin be did without. But we'll 'range ther rest o' ther p'ogramme arter we gits our persish in ther bushes."

Without further words, Carlos, seeing at once that the old scout had formed the only plan that they could hope would be successful, all urged their horses from the timber and then along the verge of the same, beneath the overhanging branches; the rank, green grass preventing the sound of their horses' hoofs from being heard—nothing, except the low "swish" of grass, marking their presence. And this was distinguishable only a short distance away.

Bald Head knew that they could thus pass over the ground at double the speed of the Comanches, who were in the winding paths; and, by a fine calculation, he was positive, as was also the Caddo, when they passed the point where the Indians were, they were exactly between them and the creek.

Above this point, for a quarter of a mile, the quarto proceeded. They then urged their horses into the bush and secured them; afterward creeping toward the stream until a favorable position was reached, from which they could await the approach of the Comanches

and their captives, and be able to decide, by the sounds, the exact passing point of their intended victims.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MORNING AT LAST.

FROM the fact that the four rescuers were dismounted, and at times halted to listen, both the Caddo and Bald Head were enabled to determine the exact path by which the Comanches were now approaching with their captives.

Buffalo paths led up and down the timber at all points, but the most marked trails were where these huge beasts had traveled in single file, toward the vast range that stretched to the Llano Estacado, or Staked Plains.

One of these most clearly defined paths the Indians were following; the same being bordered by thick undergrowth, and overarched by the branches of the bottom-timber.

Stationing Tom within a thicket, knife in hand, with orders to bound upon the Indian who was in the lead, at the moment he perceived the remainder of the party opening the fight, Bald Head directed Creeping Cat to attend to the two rear Comanches in any way that he thought fit.

Then, bidding Carlos follow him, the old scout proceeded to the trunks of two huge trees, whose thick branches overhung the path; directing the young man to ascend one of them, and, knife in hand, make ready at a signal to bound down upon the brave who rode directly behind Alice Arundale.

Having thus disposed of his little force, Bald Head crawled out on a branch, calculating his distance from Carlos, in order to be exactly over the warrior in front of the captain.

With a hiss of caution to all, the scout then attached the slack end of his lasso to the limb, adjusted the noose and coil, and, with his bowie-knife between his teeth, made ready for the desperate attempt to save the captives.

It was now rendered sufficiently light below, by bars of moonlight, to distinguish their intended victims; and all were secure from observation by being within the dense foliage.

The preparations described were soon concluded; and, but a few moments after, the sounds of approaching horsemen were distinctly heard.

All now braced themselves for the conflict.

Soon the head of the leading braves was visible above the undergrowth. Then came two other warriors, followed by the captives; while in the rear came three other braves, all allowing their horses to walk.

On came the red warriors, ignorant of the doom that hovered over them. Still on, until at the very point wished for by the old scout. Just then, one of the horses of our friends, away on the verge of the timber, gave out a squeal, as if it had been bitten by the animal nearest it.

Instantly, the cavalcade of red braves, brought their mustangs to a halt, gazing north in alarm.

Then the lasso of Bald Head hissed downward, encircling the neck of the middle brave of the three.

At the same moment, the old scout gave

a signal yell, and, knife in hand, darted through the foliage, and directly upon the Indian in front of Captain Arundale. At the same time, Carlos lighted down upon the warrior who rode behind Alice; and, with the war-cry of his tribe bursting from his throat, the Caddo sprung from his covert upon the rearmost Comanche, while Tom threw himself directly into the path, clutching the plumed sub-chief by the hair, and plunging his knife again and again into the painted breast.

The affrighted mustangs plunged and snorted, and the lassoed brave was in a moment unhorsed, and swaying from the limb, his toes just touching the ground.

Bald Head landed upon the appalled and dumfounded brave in front of the captain, and drove his knife home, and then into the breast of the warrior he had lassoed.

No human being could have withstood the fury that nerved the arm of Carlos Courtney, as he shot down upon his red foe, and nearly severed the brave's head from his body. He then rushed to the side of Alice, and slashed her bonds, when, with one glad cry of recognition upon her lips, the poor girl sunk insensible into his arms.

"Hang on ter ther critters, Tom!" yelled the scout, as he cut the bonds of Captain Arundale, who could hardly realize what had occurred.

Thus were they occupied, when a yell drew the attention of all to the Caddo.

Creeping Cat's first victim had been done for, but the other, a burly warrior, was battling for his life in a most desperate manner.

Bald Head laid the captain, who was unable to stand, by the side of the path, and rushed to the assistance of the Caddo, crying out:

"We-uns must lunge outen hyer ormighty speedy, er ther hull b'ilin' o' red hellyuns 'll be skutin' in on us!"

By the time the old scout reached the vicinity of Creeping Cat, he found it impossible to be of any assistance to him, as the combatants were twisting and rolling over so rapidly.

It was torturing to our friends to witness the jeopardy of the Caddo, who had been so faithful, and to whom they owed so much. However, the desperate struggle, in which he was now engaged, could not last for any length of time. Soon, they lay, for a moment, side by side, and panting painfully.

Bald Head stole forward to put an end to the desperate fight; but a look, and a waugh of displeasure from the Caddo, caused him to desist.

The next moment, with a herculean effort, Creeping Cat forced the Comanche to his feet, and then, by a dexterous twist of his right arm, freed his wrist from the grip of his foe. Then the bright steel glinted across a ray of moonlight, and was plunged into the painted breast of the Comanche.

The Caddo bent his victim forward, and while yet the death-chant sounded, circled his knife about the head of his foe and tore off the reeking scalp.

"Waugh!" burst from the victor's lips, as he thrust the trophy in his belt, suppressing the usual whoop of victory.

"Bully fer yeou, Caddo!" exclaimed Bald Head; "but this ain't no place ter linger. Boyees, 'git' air ther word. We've tuck 'em all in outen ther dew, but we air liarble ter be jumped any minut'!"

Scarcely were our party mounted, when volley after volley of carbine-shots, mingled with fierce whoop, yell and howl, sounded from the direction of the Comanche camp.

"Waugh!" exclaimed the Caddo, in surprise.

"Whoop!" burst from the scout. "Dang'd ef ther hellyuns ain't ketchin' it hot an' heavy all 'roun'. Ther long-knives air onter 'em, an' everythin' air hunk. We'll git yer critters an' plunder fer yer, cap'n; so brace up, an' thank ther good Lor' fer 'lowin' yer ter scrouge outen a tight box wi' yer nat'ral crap o' ha'r!"

"I do, from my inmost soul; and I thank you, my friends," returned Captain Arundale.

He then extended a hand to Carlos Courtney, which the latter eagerly grasped.

"I have misjudged you," he said; "I confess it. But there is no man on earth whom I honor more than I do you, now that I know your true character and worth."

"Jump critters speedy, folkses, an' foller ole Bald Head; fer ther red heathen'll come thiserway, scatterin'-like, an' chuck-full o' hyderphobic indig'! Plenty time ter talk arter a while. Yer kin 'ford, es ther Caddo puts hit, ter 'wait,' an' hev a reg'lar council when scalpin'-knives ain't trumps. Come on. Whoop-er-ee!"

Tom, jubilant at the safety of his master and mistress, and proud of having been of assistance, helped the captain to mount.

All being thus ready, they galloped out from the timber upon the moonlit plain until a safe distance was reached, but within view of the Comanche camp. From this rode out an officer of cavalry and three men to meet them, the Indians having been either slain or driven west in a demoralized condition.

Although the wagons and the ambulance had been discovered, the officer knew nothing of there having been a young lady captured; far less had he expected to meet such a beautiful and accomplished maiden as Alice Arundale.

A guard was now detailed to take charge of the Comanche camp, the extra animals, including the mules of Captain Arundale, being all secured with stake-ropes; and then our friends encamped with the soldiers below the place where the captain and his daughter had been captured—a spot removed from the dead, and from the howling wolves.

As may be supposed, those whom we have followed through such horrible experiences, although they had occupied but an evening and a portion of the night, were thankful to be able to lie down in peace and rest their tortured and weary frames; and not until long after the sun had risen above the eastern plain did our friends awaken, to thank God from their inmost souls that the fearful night was past.

CHAPTER XXV.

SUNSHINE.

On the morning that followed the exciting occurrences that have been related, Alice and her father slept late—slept the sleep of prostration

and fatigue—and none were allowed to disturb them or to go near their resting-place.

The detachment of cavalry, however, as well as Bald Head, Carlos, Creeping Cat and the negro Tom, were up with the sun, and busied themselves in getting everything in order, including such goods belonging to Captain Arundale as the Indians had not had time to unpack to any great extent.

With the help of a detail of the soldiers, the mules were harnessed, the wagons and Dearborn repaired, as well as the circumstances permitted, and the train taken to the Comanche camp, where the goods were replaced in the wagons, which were driven to the new camp, or headquarters.

The wounded soldiers received the best of care, a surgeon having been sent with the detachment, and the dead Comanches were left where they fell.

Many Indian horses were taken by the old scout and the Caddo, who ran the animals in from the plain, many of them being fully equipped with the peculiar saddles of the Comanches, besides carrying other plunder.

Great was the astonishment of the officer and his men, when they learned that these four had charged into the Comanche camp, and killed such a number of warriors, besides rescuing the captives afterward, when they had slain the six braves who had them in charge.

When the captain and Alice awoke, they were really dumfounded; for the wagons, with one exception, and the Dearborn, were not near at hand, ready for a start, and their goods were in order, and packed as before.

The joy and thankfulness of both were extreme, and they were at a loss how best to express their feelings to the men who had performed such prodigies of valor in their behalf.

Captain Arundale's terrible experience had made him, indeed, a changed man; and he now manifested the greatest pleasure in the company of Carlos Courtney, expressing to the young man his great regret for much that he had said and done in the past.

When Carlos informed the captain that his father had asserted that he would dispose of his plantation, and locate near to his former friend, whenever the latter came to his senses, Captain Arundale was delighted; and resolved that he would at once write, asking his old friend to forgive and forget, and requesting that he come at once to Western Texas.

However, the captain was this time determined to settle east of the Rio Liano; for he had seen enough to make him wish, above all things, never to see a hostile Indian again.

After a hearty breakfast of game and fish,

provided by the old scout and the Caddo, our friends were glad to turn their backs on the Comanche camp; and, the captain of the cavalry, having detailed four men to drive the mules, the wagon-train was started toward Fort Mason.

Nowhere on earth was there a happier pair of beings than Carlos Courtney and Alice Arundale. All their troubles and trials seemed to have been suddenly banished, by the fierce storm through which they had passed.

As for the captain, he had been truly purified by fire, and horrors that were almost beyond human comprehension.

But, kind reader, our tale is almost at an end. We wish merely to state, that Captain Arundale, under the guidance of Bald Head, found a favorable place at which to locate; and further east, where there was little danger to be apprehended from hostile red-men.

Bald Head and the Caddo volunteered as hunters for the party, until their home was established; the captain being forced to purchase more slaves to fill the places of those who had met with such a terrible death.

Soon after the ranch had been established, and cattle had been purchased, Charles Courtney arrived with a wagon-train; he having disposed of his plantation on Red River. He located a tract of land, adjoining that of his old friend; and when both men were established as rancheros, and all going on smoothly, they joined in planning another ranch near their own.

This was presented by them to their children, Carlos and Alice; who, not long afterward, became man and wife. A grand barbecue was given on this interesting occasion, rancheros, rangers, and scouts, from far and near, attending; Bald Head, and Creeping Cat, the Caddo, being, as a matter of course, present.

The latter found frequent cause in the, to him, strange proceedings, for making use of his favorite ejaculation, "Waugh!"

And years after, when the borders were devastated by the fierce and merciless Comanches, Carlos Courtney, with Bald Head and Creeping Cat, followed many a trail, and engaged in many fierce fights with the red foe; ever entertaining an intense hatred for the fiends, after the torture and anguish they had occasioned him and his, on that eventful night.

Arthur Arundale and Charles Courtney have long since passed away; but Carlos and Alice still live, surrounded by every comfort and luxury, and as happy as the day is long.

And the fine manly boys, and fair and graceful daughters, often ask of their parents a fresh recital of the experiences of that fearful night among the Comanches.

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